

Vester Lowell Crocker

A Biography by His Stepson, Richard T. Martin

Vester Lowell Crocker* was born in Union, Mississippi, on April 25, 1930. His mother and father were hard-working farmers, but they often suffered because of poor crops or bad economic conditions. They usually ate well, but when

Vester was seven years old they lost their crops and livestock because of a seven-month drought. Vester and his family were reduced to living mainly on cornbread and molasses for six months. To this day Vester will not put syrup on his pancakes.

They were sharecroppers and Vester remembers how at school the owner kids sat on one side of the room and the sharecropper children sat on the other. The owner kids had white bread while they had biscuits. Vester said, "We were treated as lower class, but it didn't matter to me what they thought. I always knew that I was headed a different way." Vester would walk barefoot to the bus stop, then wash his feet in the ditch, dry his feet with a towel he had hidden

in a mailbox, and then put on his shoes. That way he always wore clean shoes. He made his younger sister do this as well even in the winter. The other sharecropper

**Vester L. Crocker is the father of five children: Betty Marie Crocker, Wanda Sue Crocker, Randy Allen Crocker, Vickie Ann Crocker and Debra Kay Crocker. He married Patricia Bowles on December 1, 1967.*



Top left: Sylvester Crocker (father), and Ola Mae (sister). Top right: Vester, age six. Above right: Vester with his mother, Lillie Mae Warren Crocker, about 1950. Above left: Sylvester Crocker, Ola Mae Crocker and Lillie Crocker, in December 1959.

kids would come to school wearing muddy shoes.

After the season of cornbread and molasses, Vester's father moved his family from Union, Mississippi, to Yazoo, Mississippi, but after a month



Top left: First church Vester ever attended, located a few hundred feet from the house where Vester was born (top right). Middle right: Vester's second home (both houses are located eight miles west of Union, Mississippi). Above: Back view of first house and farm. Right: Vester with the car he drove as a taxi in 1948.



they had to leave because of severe flooding. At one point the waters got so high that their wagon began floating on the water. His brother, Paul, was in charge of the milk cow, and when she got loose, Paul jumped on her back and floated down the river with her. They were worried about him, but when they finally reached high ground Paul was waiting for them with the cow. They then moved seventy miles and made their new home in Newton, Mississippi. They arrived on Christmas Eve and the next day they did not have any food in the house for a Christmas dinner. At about nine o'clock in the morning his mother sat at the table and cried. At ten o'clock his father said that he was going to find food somewhere. He did not know where he was going to find it, but he was going to try. He got ready to go

out when someone knocked at the front door. Three ladies wearing bonnets handed his father three baskets full of food. He took the baskets, set them down on the table and came back to the front door to thank them for their kindness, but they were gone. His



mother and father felt that it was remarkable how they had come and suddenly disappeared. Their house sat in open country and they could see for a quarter of a mile in each direction. It was almost impossible for the ladies to have gotten away so quickly without being seen. Vester said that for some reason after that the fortunes of the family began to improve. They lived three miles outside of Newton and they had some trees on their



Top left: Charlie Barnett, Rita (Vester's second wife) and Vester, 1960. Top right: Vester and his first wife, Frances, daughters, Betty, Wanda, and son, Randy. Above left to right: Betty Crocker (daughter), unknown, Wanda Crocker (daughter), unknown, Vester Crocker, Randy (son), Ola Mae Crocker, Paul Crocker (brother), Beatrice (wife of Paul) and Charles Barnet (husband of Tatum, daughter of Annie Mae (sister)).

property. His father began to sell firewood in town and the demand was so great that he began to take two and three wagonloads at a time. Within a year they had earned

enough money to buy clothes, a team of mules, another wagon and some milk cows. When Vester was six years old he threw the family cat down a well. His sister, Ola



Above: Sisters and brothers of Vester Crocker in 1980. Left to right back row: Ola Mae Smith, Faye, Mabel and Anna Mae. Left to right front row: Paul, Vester and Ray Crocker.

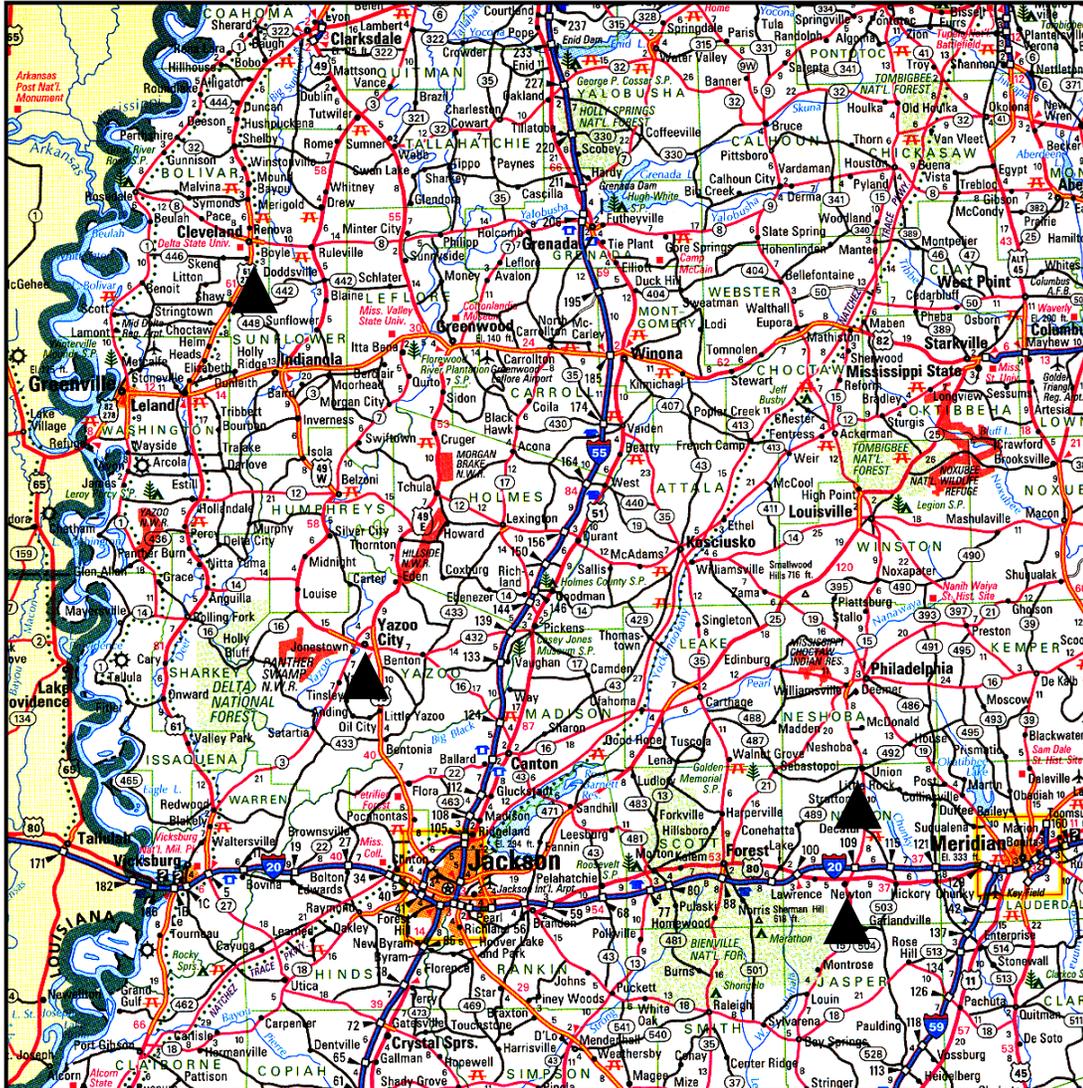
Mae, was in charge of keeping the house clean and Vester was in charge of keeping the cat out. His brothers would slip the cat into the house to make Ola Mae mad and to get Vester in trouble. The cat had been making a mess around the house and he had to clean up after it. He got tired of it so one day he grabbed the cat and threw it down their well. After awhile everyone started complaining about the taste of the water. Then they found out what happened. Vester explained, “I didn’t want to kill the cat. I just wanted to get rid of it. I didn’t think of the consequences or that the cat wouldn’t be able to get out.” The dead cat spoiled their drinking water so they had to dig a new well.

Five years later, when Vester was twelve years old, the family moved to Boyle, Mississippi. In Boyle the family bought their own farm of sixty acres.

There was always a lot of hard work to be done on the farm. They farmed the delta by using horses and mules and with hand tools. They could not afford any machine

tools or tractors. On their farm they usually grew corn, sugar cane and/or cotton. Vester picked cotton by hand for ten years. Sometimes his hands would be bleeding by the end of the day. Vester said, “I had a good life growing up, but I got tired of that kind of life.”

His parents had a good marriage. “I never heard my parents fight a day of my life.” From the time Vester was ten years old he paid for all of his own clothes.



Above: Towns in Mississippi where Vester lived from 1930 until 1950. Left to right: Boyle, Yazoo City, Newton and Union. Map courtesy of Rand McNally and Company, copyright © 2003.

Vester was thirteen years old and living at Boyle, Mississippi, when he bought his first car. It was a 1936 Ford roadster with ten thousand miles on the odometer. Vester said it was just like a new car. A neighbor had been injured by nerve gas during World War I and Vester would drive his car for him. He encouraged Vester to buy the car from him

and within a year Vester had finished paying \$402 dollars for the vehicle. He was the envy of all the teenagers in the area.

When Vester was seventeen years old he came to Houston, Texas, for the first time. He stayed about six months then returned to Mississippi. In Boyle he got a job with a traveling circus for a year. He worked as an overseer, making sure everything was put up correctly at each stop. After he quit his job with the circus, he ventured into transporting liquor from wet counties into dry ones. The most dangerous part of his job was picking up the whiskey in Tennessee and taking it into Mississippi. He drove a big car with a 200-gallon tank of moonshine on the bottom side of the vehicle. One time he narrowly escaped death when the brakes on his car went out while coming down a mountain. Once in town he would deliver the whiskey as a taxi driver. The profits made the dangers of the work tolerable. Vester made \$100 to \$150 dollars a day, but after about eight months he figured he had taken enough chances.

Vester had grown weary of working on the farm. One day in 1951, while working on a stalk cutter on his father's farm in Mississippi, Vester made a promise to God. He said, "Lord, if you will help me get out of this place I'll help these poor people get out of here too." It was only a short time later that his friend, Wayne Simmons, came to him and told him about a job in Houston.

Vester decided that this was the way out so he went back to Houston with Wayne. He began working in the carpet business, which trade he worked in for the next thirty



Top: Vester and Pat about 1972. Above: Vester in Salt Lake City, Utah, in 1972.

years. His wife, Frances Clemmons, and his daughters, Betty and Wanda Crocker, accompanied him to Houston. Vester had met Frances in Cleveland, Mississippi, and after dating for ten months, they married in 1948.

Vester encouraged his relatives and friends to move to Houston. He told them about the opportunities that existed to make a much better living in Texas than in



**Above: Vester and Pat about 1973 or 1974.
Right: Vester and Pat at the wedding reception of his stepson, Richard Martin, in 1977.**



Mississippi. Because of his efforts, twelve families moved to Houston from Mississippi.

He found them jobs and houses to rent and then he drove back to Mississippi in a rental truck, picked up their belongings and drove them to Houston. This move changed their lives forever. Among the families that he assisted were the Baker, Clemmons, Reynolds, Green and Smith families, two of his sisters, a brother and his mother and father.

Vester's mother-in-law died tragically in a fire and then his father-in-law died of a heart attack a year later. Their nine children were now orphans so Vester and Frances took them into their home and raised them with his own children. He helped them for three years until he was able to make arrangements with a Baptist school to finish raising them.

In Houston, Vester first lived on Truam off McGowan then he moved to Lawndale then to Patterson Street off North Shepherd Drive, where he lived about five years. At one time he owned seven houses and rented out six of them.

Vester and Frances had three more children: Randy Crocker, Vickie Crocker and Debbie Crocker, who were all born in Houston. They had problems in their marriage, which led to a divorce in 1960.

Vester then married Rita Henson, but this marriage lasted only about three and a half years. They did not have any children.

Vester was single for about two years when he met Patricia Bowles Martin in late 1966. At first Pat thought that Vester was childless, but after dating awhile, he told Pat that he wanted her to meet “his two children.” He brought Debbie and Vickie, his two youngest children to meet Pat and her four children. Vester said, “I didn’t lie. I just didn’t tell her that there were three more.” Eventually, Pat learned that he had three children, then four, then five children in all.

In December 1967 Vester and Pat were married. The following month the two families were united in Vester’s home at 5926 Fontenelle Street in southwest Houston. Nine children in all were now together, but the most that were ever home at the same time were six, because Ron was in the military and Nancy was

away at school. Wanda soon married and moved away and Betty was on her own. For a number of years there was only Cathy, Richard, Randy, Vickie and Debbie at home.



Top: Vester and Pat at Vickie Crocker's wedding in 1982. Above: Vester with his stepsons and step-grandchildren at Christmastime in 1987. Left to right: Jonathan, Ron, Sarah, Richard, Pat and Vester.

Then Randy went away. Ron came back for a year from the military, but soon was



Above: Vester with Pat and his stepchildren, about 1990. Left to right: Richard, Cathy, Pat, Vester, Nancy and Ron. Left: Vester and Pat in 1980s.

gone again. Debbie and Vickie married at young ages, and by 1977 only Cathy was still at home.

The year 1968 was an eventful year. Vester had experienced much success in his carpet company. He

advertised heavily on the radio and had fifty crews laying carpet all over the city. He owned Astro Floors, the largest carpet company in Houston. He had five stores and a 27,000 square foot warehouse, but things went downhill quickly when interest rates suddenly increased and builders all over the country began to go bankrupt. The builders owed him a huge amount of money, and when they could not sell their homes, they didn't pay Vester. Vester in turn could not pay his creditors and within a short time he had to close Astro Floors. The lawsuits and constant pressure from his lenders made 1969 a tough year. Vester had started over a

number of times in life, but after experiencing so much success, this downturn was the worst ever.



Top left to right: Ron Martin, Cecil McKnight, Debbie Crocker, Karen Martin, Mildred Brooks, Jonathan Martin, Pat Crocker, Vester Crocker, Sarah Martin, Vickie Crocker, Kenneth Scott, Ola Mae Crocker, and Mabel Crocker McKnight in Rockdale, Texas, in 1989. Above: Pat, Vester and Nancy Martin in 1974. Middle right: Vester and Pat in Reklaw, Texas, in 1978. Right: Richard, son, Jonathan, Pat and Vester in 1989.

Meanwhile his stepdaughter, Cathy Martin, had joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on

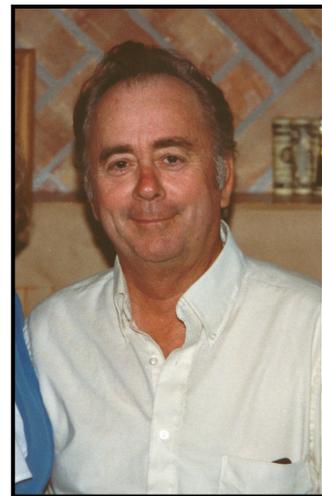
March 16, 1968. The same year his other stepchildren, Richard, Nancy and Ron Martin had also joined the church. However, at this time he had other concerns on his mind.



Top left: Vester and Pat at their farm in Reklaw after a rare snowfall in 1985. Top right: Vester with his children Wanda, Randy and Debbie. Left: Vester in his garden. Above: Vester and Pat in 1989. Below: Vester in 1989.

In 1970 Vester started a new carpet company, Hallmark Carpets.

To attract attention he stood a thirty-five foot tall Viking statue in front of the store. Later he had to remove the statue and kept it for about nine months at his home. It was quite a sight for the neighbors, who sometimes wondered what was going on. At one time someone passing by could see a small German shepherd jumping over the backyard fence, a black horse tied to the front tree, ten or more cars in the street and a giant Viking lying on his back at the side of the house. Once his stepdaughter, Nancy, was asked by a business acquaintance if she had ever been by the house with the Viking in the yard. She pretended to know nothing about it.



Vester L. Crocker—Husband of Patricia Bowles

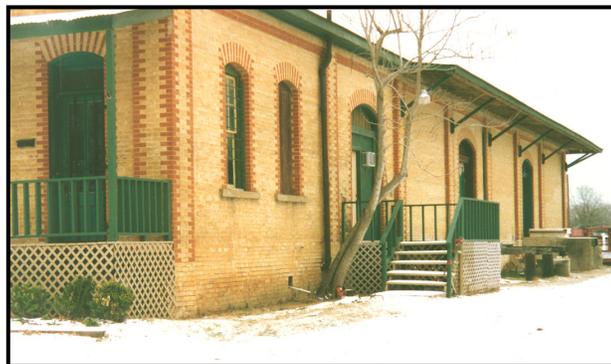
After Cathy had joined the Mormon Church, missionaries came by the house every week to see his family. Vester did not care to talk with them, but he allowed his family



Above: Vester, Randy and Pat at the Reklaw farm in 1977. Top right: Vester with his brother, Paul Crocker at his farm in Mississippi, in 2000. Right: Vester purchased and converted the old Rockdale train depot into his office for Crocker Reclamation in the 1990s and 2000s.

make any changes in his life. On April 25, 1970, his wife, Pat, joined the church.

In September 1970 Vester had what was at first thought to be a heart attack. He was in the hospital when Richard and Ron came by to visit him. Vester pointed to a Book of Mormon sitting on his desk and told them, "I'm going to read that book." Arrangements were made for the missionaries to start teaching Vester the first principles of the restored gospel. Elder Bean and Elder Barlow taught Vester the lessons and he believed what they were saying. They asked him to pray and ask God if the church



to do as they wished. On occasion, Vester would climb through his bedroom window to avoid talking with them. He was impressed with the obvious, positive changes that had taken place in the lives of his stepchildren, but he did not feel a need to

was true so that he would know for himself. Vester said, “It was Friday night and the next day I was going to be baptized so I knelt down and prayed. I said, ‘I don’t know



Top left: Vester with Pat and his stepchildren, Ron, Nancy, Cathy and Richard Martin in 2000. Above left: Vester with his sisters Ola Mae and Mabel. Top right: Pat about 1995. Above right: Vester about 1967.

and I need to know if this is true.’ That night I got my answer and the next day I was baptized.”

Huge changes took place in Vester’s life after his baptism. He quit drinking, started going to church every Sunday, studied the scriptures, and in every way improved his life.

He was immediately called as a councilor in the adult Aaronic Priesthood program. Within a few months, church temple preparation classes were held in his home. He continued to hold weekly Friday night meetings in his home from 1971 until 1974.

One night about four months after his baptism he knelt down and prayed with three other men that he had become friends with in the church. He was concerned about

his son, Randy, and the rest of his children and said a very earnest prayer. That evening, at about four o'clock in the morning, Vester received a vision. He said, "I had an out-of-body experience. I looked down and I could see Pat sleeping and my own body lying on the bed. I could see the movement of the earth and had a



Above: Vester and Pat's twenty-fifth wedding anniversary in 1992. They had a good turnout of relatives, who, for the most part, drove over a 150 miles to be there. Left: Vester with Pat, his stepchildren, and his grand-stepdaughter, Sarah Martin, in 1990.

tremendous view of everything. Jesus was standing at the end of a table and there were hundreds of people standing around the table. I couldn't exactly see the Savior, but I could hear His

voice. I looked and saw a tree standing on the side of a mountain all by itself and all the other trees had fallen down around it. I thought how strange that the tree was standing alone on the side of a mountain like that. I thought that there is no way that it should be standing like that. I asked the Lord what it meant. He told me that it represented the true church and that all the others would fall. He said, 'There will be many roads, but as you come to them you will know which one you should take. You are to warn others so they will take the right road.' When I came to myself, I woke up Pat and told her all about it. I was so excited that I called each of the other three men and told them what had happened. Two of them were already awake and said that they knew why I was calling; that I had received a vision."

Vester was only a member for a year and three months when he was called to be the elders quorum president for the Maplewood II Ward. This was the largest elders quorum in the entire region. In the church only the bishop holds more responsibility. To be called to such a high position in such a short time was very unusual. Events that soon transpired in Vester's life proved that it was an inspired call.



Above: Family reunion at Vester's home in Rockdale, Texas, in 1995. Left to right: Richard, Ron, Randy, J. Reynold's son, G. Smith's son, Jay Smith, Wally, James Reynolds, Gary Smith, Mike, Weldon, Vester, Jason's friend, Jason.

While serving as elders quorum president, Vester had many unusual experiences. He and his counselors had been working with one member that had emotional problems from the time he had completed his military service. One day Vester received a phone call from the Bishop and learned that this man was shooting at the police and that they had him pinned down in his apartment. Vester rushed to the scene and found that the police had surrounded the man's apartment. Vester told the police who he was and that he wanted to go up and talk to him. The police said, "The man will kill you!" Vester told them that the man had a wife and kids and that he had been messed up in the service. The police gave permission for Vester to try and reason with him. Vester said, "I started talking to him. I said, 'Do you know who this is?' He said, 'Yes, I do.' I said things like, 'I need to talk to you. This is wrong. I'm coming up.' I walked across the open parking lot and went upstairs. He gave me his gun and started crying on the couch. The police released him into my custody and they never pressed charges against him. We got him into a treatment center and he got better."

About this time, Vester helped a lady get out of a state insane asylum. Her kids wanted

her money and together they signed a statement saying all sorts of things and got her committed to an institution. She told Vester, “I’m not insane.” Vester investigated and



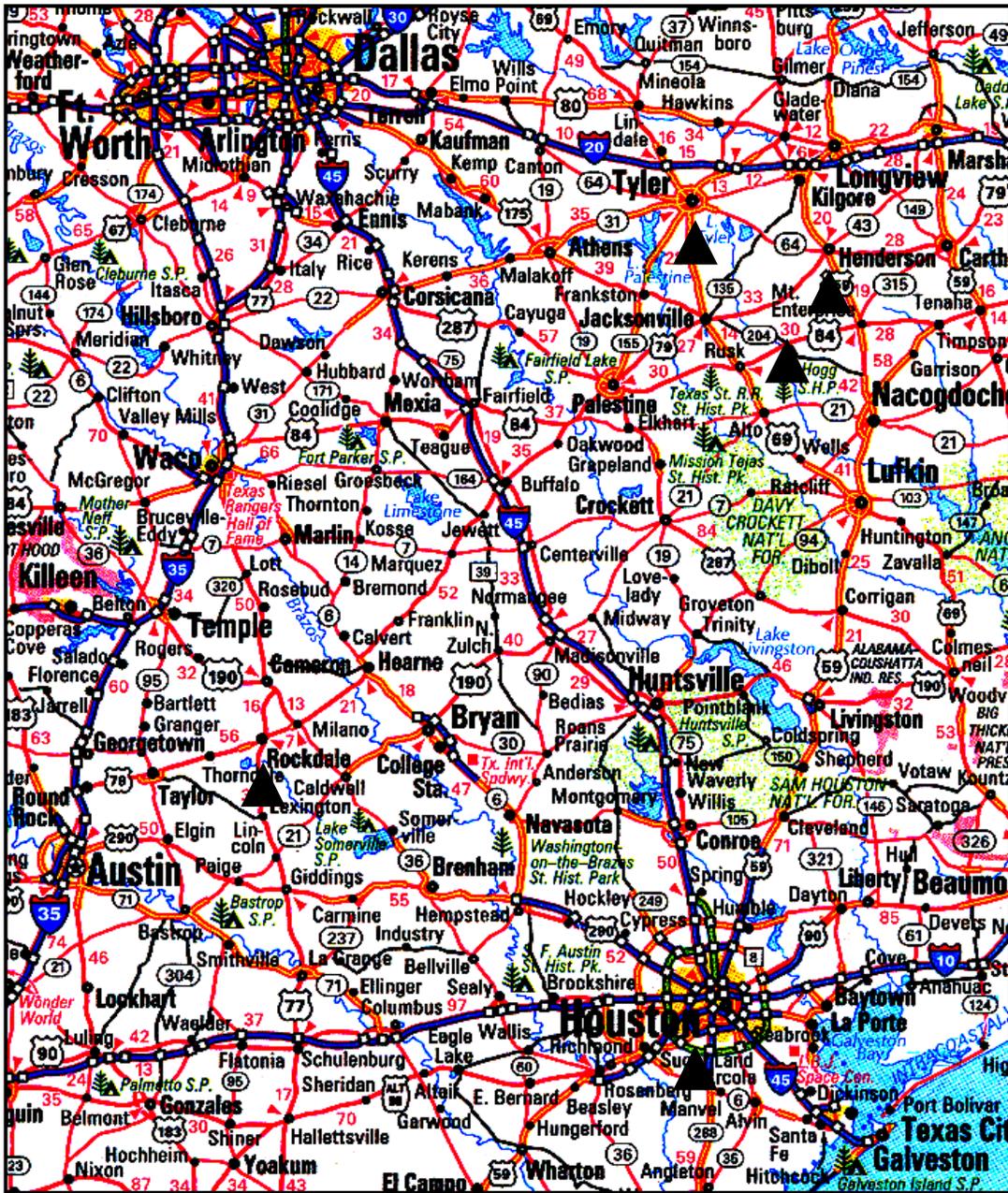
Above: Family Reunion in Rockdale in 1995. Left to right: Weldon, Maurita, Randy, Jay Smith, Ola Mae, Dorothy Smith, Betty, James Reynold’s son, Gary Smith’s son, Wally, Jason’s friend, Vickie, Mike, Debbie, James Reynolds, Vester, Jason, Pat, friend of Rachel’s boyfriend, Rachel, and Rachel’s boyfriend.

found out that the doctor, who judged her insane, was in collusion with the family. She was released and the doctor and her children were later convicted and she was able to get a restraining order to keep her children away.

Vester’s quorum was assigned to help the members of the church at the Texas Medical Center in Houston. Because the center is world renown, members of the church would come to the center from around the world. Vester gave about two hundred blessings during the three years he had this assignment. One evening alone, with his counselors, he administered to nine different persons. Vester said, “At times I would be so tired, but at other times I felt as if I was literally floating off the ground.”

One member who often attended the church seminars held in Vester’s home became critically ill. He had a bad heart and he could barely talk. He said, “I only have a day or so. I want you to bless me and my family.” Vester started giving him a blessing with Doug Preston assisting. Vester stopped in the middle of the blessing and went outside to talk to Doug. He came back into the room and said to the man, “I’m getting a bad feeling about you. Now tell me what’s going on.” The sick man confessed that he had been living with a woman for fifteen years and that they had never been married.

He said he would like to get married now. Vester quickly arranged for a marriage license and the bishop came to the hospital and performed the marriage. The man was at peace when he died four days later.



Above: Cities and towns in Texas where Vester lived and/or worked. Left to right: Rockdale, Houston, Tyler, Reklaw, and Henderson. Vester lived in Houston from 1951 until 1975; Reklaw from 1975 to 1988; and the Rockdale area from 1988 to the present, 2018. Map courtesy of Rand McNally and Company, copyright © 2003.

One day Vester was called to visit a woman living in Mayfair Park in southwest

Houston. Vester said, “I didn’t know the woman. I had never seen her in my life. She was having chest pains and asked me to give her a blessing. Her fourteen-year-



Above: Vester Crocker’s parents, siblings, and their children. Back row, left to right: Paul Crocker (brother), Beatrice (wife of Paul Crocker), Anna Mae Crocker Tatum (sister), Ola Mae Crocker Smith (sister), Billie Mack Tatum (husband of Anna Mae), Patricia Ann Smith (daughter of Ola Mae). Front row, left to right: Sylvester Crocker (father), Lille Mae Warren Crocker (mother), three unknown children, Claire Crocker (first wife of Ray Crocker), Ray Crocker (brother), Carolyn Crocker (daughter of Ray Crocker), Mable Earl Crocker (sister).

old daughter was there. I started giving her the blessing and I said that she must go to the hospital and have her arm amputated immediately. There is no way that I knew what was going on.” The daughter became very upset and told Vester that he was wrong to come in and say what he said. John Boyce had assisted Vester in the blessing, and he was so upset that he went outside and threw up. The woman called her doctor the next day and explained what had happened. He told her to come in and he checked her arm and found out that she had somehow injured her arm and gangrene had set in. He said that she must have her arm removed immediately. She did not know whether or not she could trust the doctor so she called a doctor she had known in Salt Lake City for a second opinion. The two doctors talked on the phone

and her Salt Lake doctor said that if she did not have the operation immediately that she could die in a matter of hours. She had her arm amputated and her life was saved. The daughter's attitude toward Vester was completely changed. She was very grateful to him. She and her mother had not been going to church, but this experience so impressed them that they began to attend church regularly.

In 1974 a woman traveled with her husband from California to Houston to have eye surgery. She was completely blind in one eye and was losing her sight in the other eye. Vester blessed her that her eyesight would return. They called Vester to come back to see them the next day. When he entered the hospital room she started crying, along with her husband. She could now see out of both eyes! They were very grateful. The husband had not been attending church, but he started going back again. He stood up in testimony meeting and told what had happened. I was serving as a missionary in the California Los Angeles Mission at the time and happened to be in the meeting just as he gave his testimony. I went up after the service and told him that the man who had blessed his wife was my stepfather.



Top: Vester's son and daughters, left to right: Vickie, Randy, Wanda, Vester, Betty and Debbie Crocker, about 1990. Above: His children in 1998. Left to right: Debbie, Vickie, Randy, Wanda and Betty Crocker.

Vester was home teaching a couple and the wife had a lot of problems. One day at work Vester began to think about the lady and he felt that something was wrong. He could not leave work at that moment so he called the lady's visiting teacher. He told

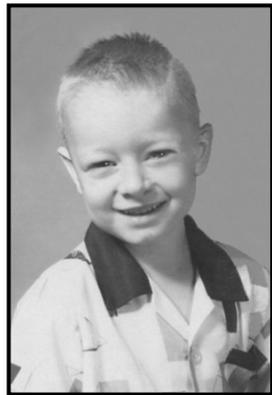
her that he felt something was wrong and asked her to go by the lady's house and see if everything was all right. When she got there she found the door locked. She looked



through the window and saw the lady lying on the floor. She called the fire department, which was only five blocks away, and they opened the door. The lady had taken an overdose of pills. They got her to the hospital and saved her life. After that her husband was able to get her into a treatment center.



One day in 1975 Vester was traveling south on Highway 59 in Houston when he came up to a number of cars that had stopped on the freeway. Something told him to get to the side of the road, which he did. As soon as he had moved over, a car with three college girls inside plowed into the back of a stopped car. One of the girls hit her head through the windshield and then she fell back into the car. Immediately, Vester ran to the girl who was hurt (the other two were all right) and carried her to his car. She was bleeding profusely. He told one girl to stay with the car and for the other girl to come with him. Blood was everywhere and he told the girl to wrap a shirt around the girl's head. Within five minutes he was at an emergency room. They asked him what he thought he was doing and Vester said, "I'm saving the girl's life. Just help her." They went to work on her and informed Vester that he might be sued. She and her parents later wrote Vester, thanking him for saving her life. The doctors later determined that if he had not acted as quickly as he had, she probably would have bled to death before the ambulance arrived.



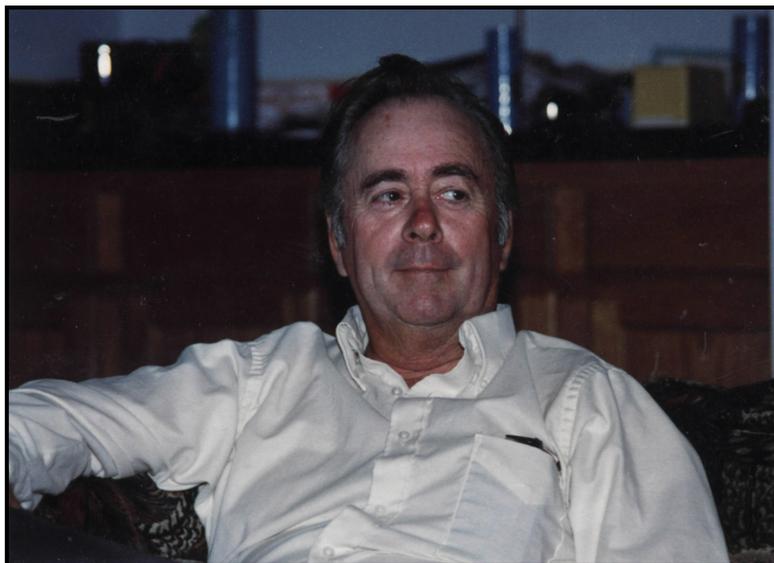
This page: School photographs of Vester's children. Top: Betty Crocker, 1957, and Wanda Crocker in 1958. Middle: Betty Crocker in 1959 and 1958. Above: Wanda Crocker, 1964, and Randy Crocker in 1959.

In 1975 Vester bought a seventy-acre farm in Rexlaw, Texas. In 1977 Vester moved from Houston to Reklaw and

opened a carpet store in Tyler, Texas. The next year he also started a swimming pool business. Later Vester felt that he might do better in Henderson, Texas, and moved his business there. He was doing well and out-bidding his competition, but a major competitor found out that Vester was a Mormon. He told the members of his church that they should be doing business with him and not with some Mormon. The next day five customers canceled their orders with Vester. In 1980 Vester left the carpet business for good. For the next four years he worked as a supervisor for Hill Top Land Improvement. In 1984 Vester started his own land reclamation company, Crocker Reclamation. Without any equipment and with borrowed money, he was able to secure a contract with Texas Utilities. He was successful enough to get the heavy equipment that he needed and to pay back all of his loans. In 1988 Vester moved his company to Rockdale, Texas, where he won a contract with ALCOA (Aluminum Company of America). During some years his business did very well. In 1996 he employed sixty-three people.

While living at Reklaw, Texas, Vester served faithfully in the Henderson Branch of the church. He served as elders quorum president three times. He also served as high priests group leader and as second counselor in the branch presidency. During this time he helped the branch grow from a congregation of 30 people meeting in an old store, to a ward with a beautiful new building and 266 members.

In the Rockdale Branch, Vester served as mission leader and first counselor in the branch presidency for many years.



Top: Vester about 1996. Above: Vester on a Sunday afternoon “out on the deck” with Pat, Cathy and Ron in May 1999. On pleasant days many happy hours were spent here until Cathy died in 2002.

On May 12, 1996, Vester bought a twenty-two acre farm seven miles northeast of Rockdale, Texas.



Above left to right: Vanessa Barnet (Margie's daughter), Margie Mae Tatum Barnet, Charles Barnet, baby, Annie Mae Crocker Tatum (sister), Vester Crocker, Betty Crocker (daughter) and Mabel Crocker (sister) in Philadelphia, Mississippi; July 2001. Right: Vester and Pat on November 14, 1999. Lower right: Henderson Ward building. Partly through Vester's leadership, the church membership in Henderson grew from thirty members to hundreds. They first met in an old store, but in a few years were able to build this new meetinghouse.



Vester has made many sacrifices for his family and others. Whenever his children have needed help he has been there to encourage them and, when necessary, to assist them materially. In 1980 he built a house on his farm where his father-in-law, Thomas Bowles, could live. He helped him for thirteen years until his death in 1993. When his stepdaughter, Cathy Martin, got cancer he welcomed her into his home and had fences and a barn built to accommodate her thirty horses.



In October 1998 Vester had a heart attack. He had major open-heart surgery, which was followed by two more operations. The members of his family gathered around him



Above: Crocker family at the funeral of Cathy Martin on September 12, 2002. Left to right: Maurita, wife of Weldon Smith, Weldon (son of Ola Mae Crocker Smith), Randy Crocker, Mabel Crocker (sister), Cecil LeRoy McKnight (husband of Mabel), Debbie Crocker, Vester Crocker, Vickie Crocker, Betty Crocker and Wanda Crocker. Right: Some members of Vester's Rockdale Branch on September 12, 2002.



during this time. His daughter, Vickie, said, “He has always been the strong pillar of the family. It just doesn’t seem possible that he could be ill.”

Vester has now (April 2000) recovered his health and at the age of seventy is still working. He was recently awarded a new contract with ALCOA and continues to work many hours every week in doing service in and out of the church.

In 2001 Vester was called to be branch president. He stays very busy with his church calling, running a company, and serving his family and friends.

His family and many others love Vester. He has profoundly affected the lives of many people for good. Vester has overcome much opposition and set a wonderful example by his patience, love, understanding and service.

Update: November 17, 2008. Vester is still serving as president of the Rockdale Branch. He has now served in this calling for over seven years, which is much longer than normal.



Just a few weeks ago he had to have an emergency surgery for a ruptured colon and could have died, but is much better now. Just a week later he was back at church even though he “had to move around slowly.”

On Thanksgiving Day in 2006 he lost my mother, his beloved wife of thirty-eight years, and just seven months later on June 9, 2007, his son, Randy Crocker, died. This has brought new challenges into Vester’s life. He decided to renew his contract with ALCOA and keeps busy most days at the mine. His church work helps him find fulfillment on another level. Just a couple of months ago he completed a new house and



Above: New home completed by Vester in late 2008. **Right:** Vester and me, Richard Martin, standing on his new porch in March 2009.

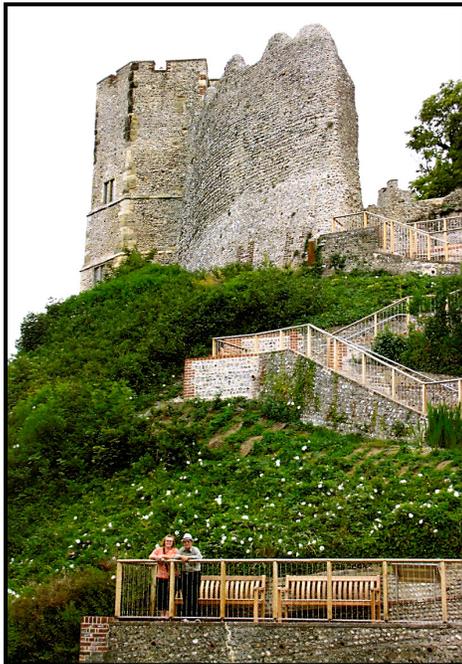
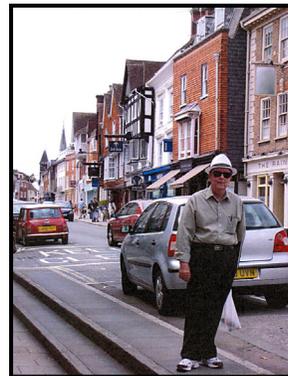
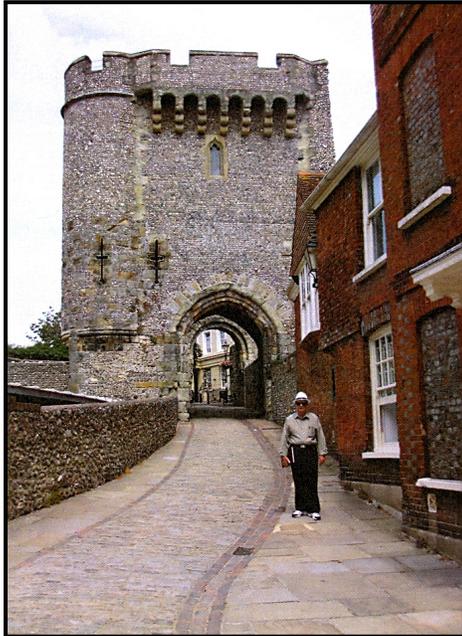
has recently moved. The house is located a few miles from Rogers, about half way between Rockdale and Temple.

Vester’s attitude remains positive and he has been able to continue to bless the lives of many people.

Recently, Vester reminded me of a boyhood story that was not included in this history: There was an old frame church near his home and he and another friend liked to climb up into its attic. One day they scooped up a bunch of ants from an anthill into a glass jar and climbed into the church’s loft. The people came into the building for a worship service. In the middle of the meeting they began to drop some of the ants onto the people. There were ceiling fans and the ants hit the fans and spread all over the congregation. People began to itch and some got up. The preacher said, “That’s it. Now you’re getting it.” But they weren’t feeling the Spirit. Soon some people realized that the itch was coming from ants and went outside. Vester and his friend had been in the attic for some time and it was getting hot. The heat was almost too much for them,



but they didn't want to get caught. Finally, everyone went outside and they thought this was their chance. They quickly climbed down and ran away, making a clean escape.



Above and left: Vester at Lewes Castle, located south of London, England; June 2009. The original castle was built by his 26th Great-Grandfather, William de Warren (brother-in-law of William the Conqueror and 1st Earl of Surrey), in 1087. Below: Stained glass window of William de Warren.

In June 2009 Vester traveled to Europe for the first time. For years he had wanted to go, but Mother didn't have any interest in such a trip so he never went. Now at the age of seventy-nine he made the trek across the water; and not for a token trip, but one that lasted twenty-five days. His neighbor, Kelli Dudley, and her daughter, Jahkoby "Koby" Dudley, accompanied him on his journey.



that lasted twenty-five days. His neighbor, Kelli Dudley, and her daughter, Jahkoby "Koby" Dudley, accompanied him on his journey.

I requested Kelli to give me some details of their trip. She said that while in England they spent five days in London and the surrounding area. She wrote, "On a beautiful Sunday afternoon we took the train from Victoria Station down to

Lewes, about an hour south. We had no idea where we were going once we got there, but I thought, ‘Well it can’t be that hard;’ so I told Vester we could just ask around.”

“As soon as we got off the train we asked a very kind woman in the magazine shop if she knew where Lewes Castle was and how we could get there. She giggled, took my hand as she led me out the door and pointed up the hill and said, ‘Oh, you mean that castle? Why you can just walk a bit; it’s just there up the hill.’ So up the hill we went until we came to the entrance. Vester had brought the book that you compiled for him and he went up to the gift shop where he quickly made an impression! They let us in for free and tried to reach the caretaker of the castle so that he could give us a private tour, but he was gone, it being Sunday. They encouraged Vester to come back in the spring for the annual festival.”

“As we toiled around the grounds and up the *many* stairs we came across a very nice trio of visitors. They heard us speak and the gentleman, also from the USA, asked, ‘Where are you from? The south? Texas?’ I said we were and that we were visiting my friend’s ancestral castle. The two older women with him got wide-eyed and started asking all kinds of questions about Vester’s ancestors, lineage and if he was still in line for the crown! They insisted on kissing his hand and hugging him, as well as having their pictures taken with him. ‘We take this very seriously here in England,’ the one said. It was so cute; they were just giddy, having met something akin to royalty, and of course you know Vester. He ate up every minute of it! Anyway, Vester was very touched, standing atop the tower, looking out over the valley, seeing all that his ancestors must have seen at one time as well.”

“After several hours enjoying a tranquil afternoon we reluctantly ended our visit to Lewes, said goodbye to the friendly spirits there and headed back to London with a few lovely memories tucked away to share with friends and family.”

Vester toured Ireland, England, France, Germany and Austria on this trip. His favorite country was Ireland.

Note: A major turning point in Vester’s life came when he prayed that if the Lord would get him out of Mississippi that he would help his poor friends and relatives move also. He was on a tractor at the time and as he said these words he could see a dust twister coming towards him. When it was about 300 yards away it went up into the sky and suddenly there came a cool breeze. The temperature was about 100 degrees at the time, but it dropped to about 85 degrees. There were about fifty people working the field at the same time and they stopped what they were doing and looked up to see what was going on. Vester went home for lunch and told his family what he had prayed for and what had happened. His mother said that the Lord was answering his prayer and letting him know that he was heard. Soon his friend, Wayne Simmons, told him about Houston and Vester’s life changed forever. Vester moved to Houston and then helped twelve families do the same; in fact he employed many of them in his business. He recognized this as a significant moment in his life and has since referred to it as the “Cool Breeze.”

(I introduced Vester to Janice Peay in 2011 and they have now been happily married for seven years. He continues to run his company and recently said to me, “You know you really do slow down as you get older. I use to work twelve hours a day, but now I can only work ten.” Vester turned 88 years old on April 25, 2018.)