

## Our First Six Chiefs of the Clan

- I. **Thomas Spurgeon Stroud (1880-1974) was the founder of the Bartons of the South Annual Reunion at Tyger Baptist Church in 1935.** He was also our first Chief of the Clan<sup>1</sup>. He was elected at the 23<sup>rd</sup> Barton Reunion in 1962. “This remarkable farmer – scholar – world traveler was in the first graduating class of North Greenville Academy before it was North Greenville College. He was in San Francisco before the big fire and earthquake. He knew the old West before many of the territories became states.”<sup>2</sup> T. Spurgeon Stroud held the office of Chief of the Clan from 1962 until his death in 1974. After his passing his 2<sup>nd</sup> Cousin Once Removed (2C-1XR), William Perry Barton, would become the next Chief of the Clan and his 3<sup>rd</sup> Cousin Once Removed (3C-1XR), Thelma Mae (Barton) Stephens Gilbreath, would later become editor of the Barton Bulletin (1977-1989) and Chief of the Clan herself in 1988.



T. Spurgeon Stroud



WILLIAM PERRY BARTON

- II. In an article titled “Successor to the late Thomas Spurgeon Stroud is chosen” **in the 1975 Christmas Edition of the *Barton Banner*, William Perry Barton’s election at the 35<sup>th</sup> annual Barton Reunion in August as Chief of the Clan was announced.** Sadly, in the very same issue on the inside-back cover was an announcement by editor Eleanor Keese Barton (Mrs. William P.) of her husband’s passing just three months after his election on November 17, 1975. One year later Cousin Eleanor in the 1976 Christmas Edition said “It was I who had been his wife for almost 52 years who hoped that in his election as Chief

of the Clan you had recognized his scholarship, his love of good books and fine music, that he had fulfilled his obligation as a citizen, that you appreciated his honest and integrity and his generosity toward both individuals and institutions in need of his help.” Cousin Eleanor went on “You will forgive me if this ‘thank you’ for naming my beloved William, Chief of the Clan, became a brief eulogy, but I felt that you were due an explanation of why the same Bulletin carried the story of his election and the announcement of his death.”

It was, in fact, William Perry Barton who was the author of the very first Barton Bulletin (precursor to the current Barton Historical Society Newsletter) at Christmas-

<sup>1</sup> *The Barton Bulletin*, Winter Edition 1978-1979, pp. 1-3

<sup>2</sup> Roberts, John, excerpts from his Sep. 1972 column in *Baptist Courier* as reprinted the *The Barton Bulletin*, 1972 Christmas Edition.

time of 1959 as a two-page letter capturing Barton family anecdotes and suggesting that a regular newsletter could follow. It was just a few months later that the second issue, 1960 Easter Edition, was edited by the husband-and-wife team of William Perry Barton and Eleanor Keese (“cousin by birth and choice”) Barton.

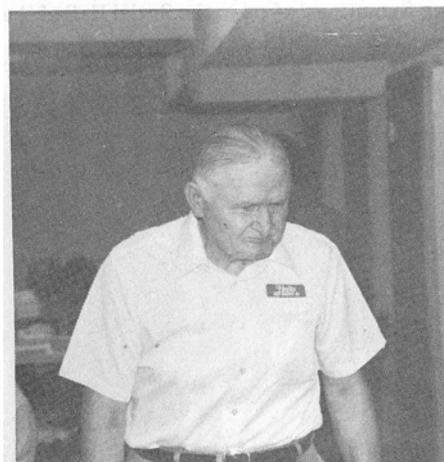
- III. **The Rev. Joe Frank Barton was born Oct. 31, 1895 in Canton, Georgia**, to Joseph Carroll Barton (1871-1959) and Lillie Mae Beavers (1876-1966), the eldest of seven children. A native of Cherokee County, Georgia, a graduate of Mercer University and Southern Seminary and a World War I veteran.



The Rev. Joe Frank Barton

A Baptist minister and associational missionary for sixty years, his election to the high office of Chief of the Clan was announced in the 1976 Christmas Edition Barton Bulletin. Interestingly, the same issue also announced the election of Betty (Barton) Howard to the office of President of the Barton Reunion (later Barton Historical Society). In 1976 Rev. Joe Frank Barton while in retirement was named pastor emeritus of Sunnyside Baptist Church in Albany, Georgia. It was particularly significant because it recognized his contribution to not just one church but to the church as a whole. In 1976 it was said of him “He is an outstanding Baptist and devoted to all the denomination stands for... Many times Cousin Joe Frank has served the reunion held at Tyger Church as president – and always with splendid efficiency and devotion.”

- IV. **Theron Earle Barton (1907-1987) was our 4<sup>th</sup> Chief of the Clan.** Elected first in 1980 at the 41<sup>st</sup> Barton Reunion he held that office until his death on August 31, 1987. Born in Tigerville, South Carolina, the son of William Arthur Barton (1881-1953) and Mildred Eva Southern (1883-1974). Theron was the first of twelve children and the eldest brother to the eldest daughter Thelma Barton. Theron was married to Ruth Smith and they had two children, James Earle Barton and Betty Ruth Barton (later President of the Barton Reunion and, now, our newest Chief of the Clan!).



Theron E. Barton- Chief of the Clan

Theron’s working career spanned some forty-three years retiring first as Unit Supervisor at the Southern Bleachery and Print Works at Taylors, South Carolina, where he worked for 33 years and second at the Greenville County Correctional Center after working there 10 years. At his funeral the officiant said “Theron Barton knew every pig trail and rabbit track in this country; he could call every hill and mountain by name... But not only this, he knew the people and their background. People would sit in awe as he would tell them of their roots and heritage.”

- V. **Thelma (Barton) Stephens (1909-1995) our 5<sup>th</sup> Chief of the Clan was elected at the 49<sup>th</sup> Annual Barton Reunion.** She was born in Tigerville, South Carolina, the daughter of William Arthur Barton (1881-1953) and Mildred Eva



Southern (1883-1974). Thelma was the second of twelve children and the eldest sister to the eldest son Theron Earle Barton (who preceded her as our 4<sup>th</sup> Chief of Clan). She was a life-long teacher including Home Economics at McCreary County High School, Kentucky. Married 1<sup>st</sup> to Leonard Stephens, widowed and married 2<sup>nd</sup> to William O. Gilreath, divorced. Living in Kentucky Thelma gradually became involved with the Barton Reunion and the Bartons of the South in the 1970's. She became only the second editor of the

Barton Bulletin in 1977 and was elected Treasurer in 1978. Thelma held both important offices for the next 13 years and was recognized with her elevation to Chief of the Clan in 1988.

[A gap in the office of Chief of the Clan existed following Thelma (Barton) Stephens Gilreath's death in 1995 until Ruth (Barton) Coleman's election in 2001.]

**VI. Our 6th Chief of Clan Ruth Barton Coleman (1913-2005) was born on March 22, 1913** on a small farm in the surrounding rural community of Poetry, outside of Terrell, Texas, which is now part of the greater Dallas, Texas, community. She attended North Texas State Teachers College. While working in Louisiana for Western Union, she met and later married Marion Hull Coleman. They were married for over fifty years and lived their life together in Austin, Texas. Ruth Coleman was a long time employee of the State of Texas. After her retirement she focused her efforts on genealogy doing countless hours of research on the Barton, Wilson, Graves, Abercrombie and Coleman families. Ruth was elected Chief of the Clan at the 62<sup>nd</sup> Annual Barton Reunion held at Tyger Baptist Church, Tigerville, South Carolina in August 2001. Our president, Terry Barton, said of Ruth after her passing in 2005 "Ruth Barton Coleman was noted for her genealogical research and was the most important Barton researcher of the modern era."

