

Meriwether Lewis Randolph:

Grandson of Thomas Jefferson and Arkansas's Last Territorial Secretary

Among this region's most noted early settlers was Meriwether Lewis Randolph, grandson of President Thomas Jefferson. Randolph and his wife moved to Clark County in 1836 and built a home about three miles from Gurdon. Upon his untimely death in 1837, Randolph was buried on the grounds of their farm, but with his wife's departure from Arkansas, his land holdings of almost 11,000 acres were lost by the family.

Meriwether Lewis Randolph, son of Thomas Mann Randolph and Martha Jefferson Randolph, was born in 1810 at Monticello, the home of his grandfather, Thomas Jefferson. He was named by his grandfather for Meriwether Lewis, best known for his exploration of the Louisiana Territory. Coincidentally, Lewis traveled the western part of this continent with the man for whom Clark County was named, William Clark.

Randolph met his future wife, Elizabeth "Betty" Martin, while working in the White House on the staff of President Andrew Jackson. Jackson appointed Randolph to be Secretary of Arkansas Territory in March of 1835, and Meriwether and Betty married about two weeks later. Randolph immediately came to Arkansas to begin his duties.

Arkansas Territory soon became the State of Arkansas (1836), and Randolph's government appointment came to an end. He made real estate investments for Eastern capitalists, purchasing thousands acres of land. Randolph bought some 6,000 acres in south Clark County between Terre Noire Creek and the Little Missouri River, which became his family's homesite. In November 1836, the family moved to the Clark County property. By this time, Meriwether and Betty had a son, Lewis Jackson Randolph.

In 1837, he made a trip to Camden for supplies, and upon returning home, had a fever. He was ill for about ten days with what may have been malaria, and died on September 24, 1837, four months before his twenty-eighth birthday.

Today, deep in the heart of the woodlands of south Clark County, lies Meriwether Lewis Randolph--Thomas Jefferson's grandson and last territorial secretary of Arkansas. In 1960 the Daughters of the American Colonists marked the spot with a granite monument and surrounded it with an ornamental iron fence. The gravesite, hidden within underbrush of a dense forest, now remains as a simple memorial to a member of a very prominent family in United States history.

