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Missing Portrait

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Anyone with information concerning this missing portrait should contact the *Quarterly*.

MISSING PORTRAIT

Gov. and Mrs. Clay felt the health of their first son was precarious and perhaps he would not grow to manhood. In 1821 they had an oil portrait commissioned. The painter was probably Grimes, and he posed the five year old, Clement Claiborne Clay, with the back-drop of the bluffs at the Big Springs in Huntsville.

Young Clay later became Sen. C. C. Clay, Jr. and was imprisoned with Jefferson Davis for many months at Fortress Monroe at the end of the Civil War. Clay and his wife had no children of their own, but were very fond of his brother Wither's children. According to a story printed in the family newspaper, this particular Clay painting was in the possession of his nephew, William L. Clay.

Willie Clay died in 1911, leaving a widow and small son about the age of two. His widow and the boy kept a boarding house at the corner of Madison and Gates for many years. In 1917, she remarried, Lewis Colfax Gibbs, a corn salesman from Iowa. Possibly he had stayed at the boarding house. But by 1920, this family had left Huntsville perhaps for Canada. One would assume young Clay, the great-grandson of Gov. Clay, would have been raised to be proud of his heritage and not take the name of his step-father.

Currently it is not known where this portrait is located. William Lewis Clay, Jr., could well still be alive. Certainly there are people in the community who could remember the events and know where the Gibbs family settled. What a treat it would be to locate the portrait, to have a photograph or reproduction made to share in that past bit of Huntsville history of days and people gone by.

Nancy Rohr