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Lawyer, Judge, Teacher, Advocate*

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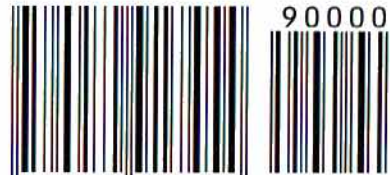
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*Published in conjunction
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Historical Association*

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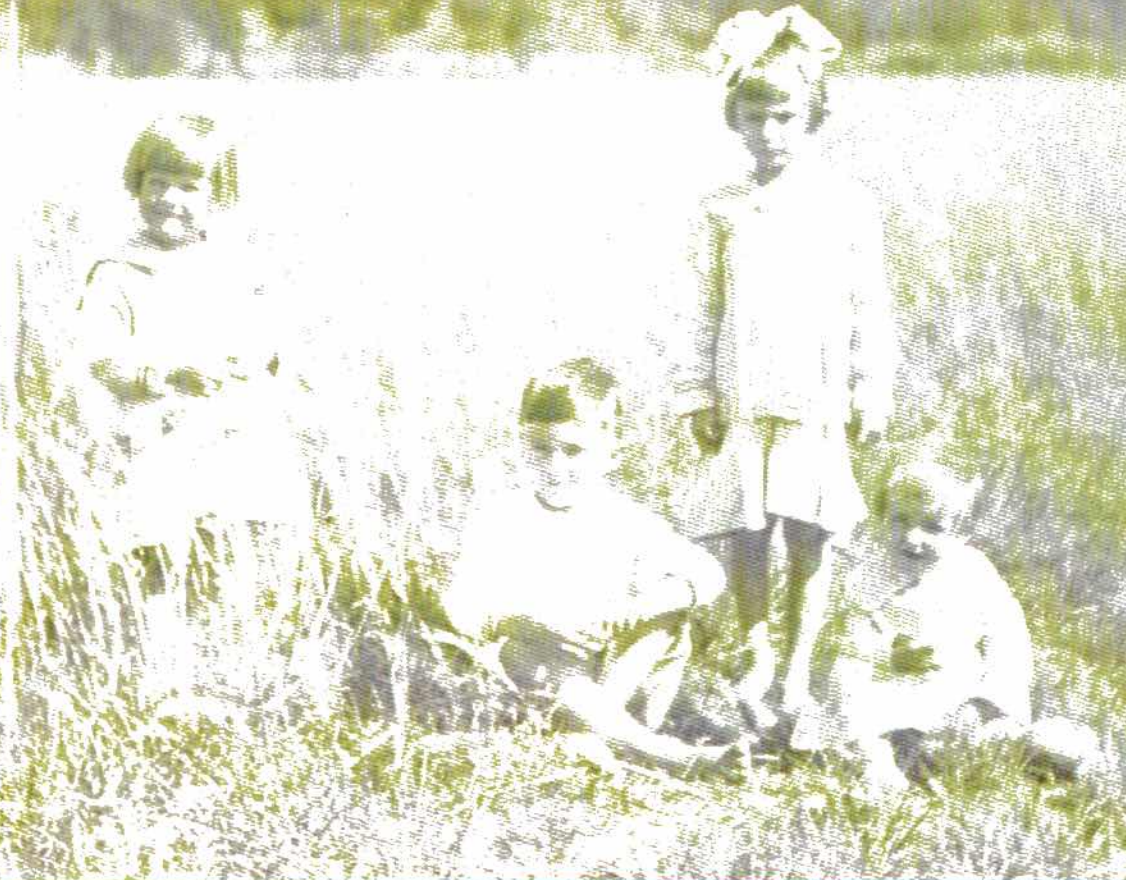
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GROWING UP HARD

R.H. DYKES

GROWING UP HARD



Memories of Jackson County, Alabama,
in the Early Twentieth Century

By Donald H. Dykes

Growing up in the early twentieth century was hard in the Appalachian foothills of Jackson County, Alabama.

For this book, Ronald H. Dykes held in-depth interviews with a number of Jackson countians in their late eighties and nineties. They describe in vivid detail their daily lives at home and in the community during the early part of the last century.

From these memories, the reader gains an understanding of what life was like in a time and a place that no longer exist. Dykes shows that these remarkable senior citizens not only survived—they prevailed and readily adapted to the momentous changes that occurred during their lengthy lifetimes.

About the author:

Ronald H. Dykes, who lives in Scottsboro, Alabama, is concerned that he may not age as gracefully as the remarkable citizens in this book.

About the Jackson County Historical Association:

Since the Jackson County Historical Association was founded in 1975, its primary objectives have been preservation, documented research, and dissemination of Jackson County's historical culture. The association takes great pride in producing resources which facilitate the study and preservation of the county's rich heritage as an avenue for enlivening the present as well as the future.



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Books by Ronald H. Dykes:

*James O. Haley—
Lawyer, Judge, Teacher, Advocate*

*Growing Up Hard:
Memories of Jackson County, Alabama, in
the Early Twentieth Century*

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*Memories of Jackson County, Alabama,
in the Early Twentieth Century*

by
Ronald H. Dykes



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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to James Norwood Clemens, Lillie Mae Culbert, Ida Miller Olinger, Opal Wright Peters, Rubilee Moore Smith, Archie Freeman Stewart, Gertrude Isabella Stockton and to the memory of Sue Mae Freeman Powell. I owe them a debt for giving me a better perspective on aging, and they have shown me that it is possible to live to an advanced age with grace, charm and humor. I would like to dedicate this poem (author unknown) to them with the hope that their remembrances on the following pages will enable them to avoid the anonymity implied in its lines.

DEAR ANCESTOR

*Your tombstone stands among the rest
neglected and alone.
The name and date have worn off
the weathered marble stone.
It reaches out to all who care...
it's now too late to mourn,
You did not know that I exist,
You died...and I was born.*

*Yet each of us are cells of you
in flesh, in blood, in bone.
Our hearts contract and beat a pulse
entirely not our own.
Dear Ancestor, the place you filled
some hundred years ago
spreads out among the ones you left
who would have loved you so.
I wonder how you lived and loved.
I wonder if you knew
that someday I would find this place
and come to visit you.*

AUTHOR'S NOTE

We are born, we live, and we die. For a few fortunate individuals, their lives are documented in biographies, autobiographies, histories, and other means. For most of us, however, remembrances of our existence as real living breathing persons essentially fade away and have disappeared after only a few generations. Of course, the facts of our lives persist in birth, marriage and death certificates, and some of us may have had our "fifteen minutes of fame" in some manner, but little else remains.

For instance, who among our adult families or friends remembers our not-so-distant ancestors, such as our great-grandparents? We may have heard our parents or grandparents talk about them, and we may know when they were born and when they died, but do we really know anything substantial about them? What kind of persons were they? Were they industrious? Did they have a sense of humor, or were they dour and not much fun? Did they attend school? If so, where? In other words, we don't know them as people or how they actually lived their lives.

On the following pages, I hope to have captured a least a glimpse of the lives and personalities of a number of remarkable elderly residents of Jackson County, Alabama, who I interviewed over a two year period beginning in the summer of 1999. In selecting these subjects, I had several criteria.

They should have been born and raised in Jackson County (or moved here at an early age) and have lived in the county most of their lives. Also, they should be in their late eighties or nineties and have intact mental faculties.

As far as possible, I have allowed all the subjects to speak in their own voices by quoting them directly, which preserves the way they actually talk and gives some insight into their personalities. This can be tricky if their everyday language does not always represent the best in the King's English. One lady even informed me that she knew how to "talk proper", since she had been a school teacher, but she understood why I used her ordinary everyday way of speaking. Each of them had the opportunity to read, correct and approve their stories (except for the short epilogues and prologues). In fact, the more assiduous of the former teachers used a fairly heavy hand in making corrections.

Capturing personal histories of these people was not the only objective I had. A life can not be separated from where it is lived. All of them grew up in Jackson County in the earlier part of the twentieth century, and their time, place and lives are certainly different from those of their contemporaries who were raised in wealth on Fifth Avenue in New York. After all, Jackson County is in lower Appalachia. In taping these subjects, I emphasized their growing-up years more than their later adult lives, attempting to get some sense of life in the county during the first third or so of the twentieth century. Where were the churches and schools and stores? What were they like? Where were the roads? What types of transportation were available? What were their parents and siblings like? I asked them to describe their homes, what they

ate, what was raised on the farms, and other rather mundane but essential aspects of daily living.

After just a few histories were taped, a general pattern of life during that period of time began to emerge. Most were raised on farms and were quite familiar with long hours of hard work. Families, including extended families, were close. Their parents were poorly educated, as were most people of that era, but most insisted that their children take advantage of the educational opportunities available, such as they were. Churches seemed to be important centers of spiritual and social activities. Surprisingly, the experiences of each of them were quite similar regardless of differences in social standing, wealth (or lack of it), and even race. Apparently, Jackson County in the earlier years of the twentieth century was not an easy place in which to live or grow up. After all, only limited transportation, entertainment and shopping options were available, so those with more disposable income had few choices on how to spend it.

Yet, despite the somewhat primitive conditions in Jackson County in the first part of the twentieth century, all of these remarkable elderly citizens have adapted well to the modern age. Keep in mind that they have lived through two world wars; several lesser conflicts; the advent of radios, automobiles, television, computers, and movies; and many other conveniences (and annoyances) we now consider commonplace. One lady was even born before the Wright Brothers flew the first airplane. Perhaps their adaptability contributed to their longevity. Whatever the case may be, they were a pleasure to interview, and I am the one who benefitted from our relationship.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A project such as this would not be possible without the valued assistance of others, and I am more deeply appreciative of the efforts of the following than they can possibly imagine:

Drenda King, John Graham and their colleagues in the Jackson County Historical Association for helping in the publication;

Ann Chambless for her encouragement and friendship;

Lynne and Elgin Carver at the Paint Rock River Press for making an unpolished manuscript look like a real book;

And foremost, the wonderful people who are the subjects of this book.

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RUBILEE MOORE SMITH

My first session with Rubilee Smith began with a devotional. My mother, who knew Rubilee as a fellow member of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in Scottsboro, had made the first contact with her for me. When I called Ms. Smith to set up an appointment, she suggested that I come the following Tuesday afternoon at 1:00 p.m. This, she informed me, was when Dr. Pepper had his devotional for the residents of the assisted living facility where she lived.

When I arrived, the program was just beginning. Six or seven elderly residents, mostly women, were in a semicircle, listening to Dr. Morris Pepper, a retired and highly respected former minister at the Presbyterian Church. For unavoid-



*Rubilee Smith in the fourth grade
at Hollywood School, 1924*

able reasons, most of the audience seemed to have difficulty focusing on the message. Rubilee, however, was paying close attention, leaning forward in her wheelchair, not wanting to miss a word. After about thirty minutes or so, Dr. Pepper, who is almost ninety years old himself, asked Rubilee for her input. His request and her response indicated to me that I might have an excellent subject to interview, which proved to be the case.

Afterwards, I wheeled her to her quarters, which consisted of two small, handsomely furnished rooms. Rubilee told me she had only been in the facility six months or so. For several years, she had been bothered by a mysterious weakness in her legs and was now unable to walk. Otherwise, she would not have moved from her home near downtown Scottsboro. She seemed delighted to have the opportunity to talk to me about her life, and over the next few weeks we had several other sessions. I could tell she was a former teacher-her grammar was perfect, and her thoughts were well organized. Her recall of names, places, and events was remarkable. Obviously, Dr. Pepper had good reason to value her comments.

Rubilee Moore Smith was born in Roaches Cove, which is north of Fackler in Jackson County, Alabama, on March 12, 1916. She was born at home. In attendance was a Doctor McClendon, who lived in Hollywood. To get to Roaches Cove for the birth, Doctor McClendon took a train from Hollywood to Fackler, where he was met by Rubilee's father on a buggy. Rubilee remembers being told by her mother that "The doctor did get there in time."

Rubilee's father was Leroy Moore. His family was relatively new to the area, having settled in Jackson County in 1898, but her great-great-grandfather had migrated from Virginia to Niota, Tennessee, near Athens, in 1833. As she tells it, "My great grandfather George Washington Moore and most of the other Moores stayed in that area, but my grandfather, John A., seemed to have wanderlust. He and many others migrated into Arkansas because farming was better there. A big flood came, and he lost everything he had. He knew some people there who were from Jackson County, so that is how he came to the Stevenson area. They later moved to Carns, where the family was farmers."

Her mother's family, however, were long time residents of Jackson County. Her great-great-grandfather Samuel Brown Inglis (the first of three with this name) moved to this area from Rowan County, North Carolina, in 1819 "before Alabama was a state. They were squatters, I guess." Francis Renshaw, the brother of her great-great-grandmother, Elizabeth, moved here at the same time and became a prominent landowner. The family settled near Mud Creek "for the water," but later moved to a cove named Inglis Hollow to get to higher ground "because of all the malaria." Her maternal great-grandfather, Elijah Renshaw Inglis, also owned considerable property in the area. Rubilee's grandfather, the third Samuel Brown Inglis, was a farmer, just as his father and grandfather had been. Rubilee's mother was Martha Elizabeth Inglis.

Ms. Smith has done extensive research on the family of her maternal grandmother, but there are gaps. She was a Morris and her father, Archibald, was a Yankee who had

fought with the union. "My mother tells the story that he had to hide out when he came to this area because the feelings were so high." Rubilee's maternal grandmother and grandfather met when he went to check on a farm that her great-grandfather, Elijah Inglis, owned in Maynard's Cove.

Rubilee was born in a brick house that her grandfather Inglis had bought from C. L. Roach's heirs in 1900 for about ten thousand dollars (the price included a section of land as well). The house had been built by C. L. Roach and was "one of three antebellum homes built from glaze-made bricks at about the same time. The bricks required a long while to dry, so the mason would use up a supply of bricks at one location and then work on another one. A cornerstone on one of them is dated 1843. The one I was born in is no longer standing. After my grandfather's death, it had three different owners, but they didn't live there, and it had gone down. Then a tornado damaged the upper story, and a motor explosion finished ruining it. Dr. Bankston's wife, Stina, wanted a house made of old bricks, and so the bricks were used when they built their house in 1952." She thinks the original section of land is still intact, however. The other two brick houses are still standing, and one of them, known as the "Moody Brick," is now being restored. The third is the Austin-Coffey-Matthews house located in the Rash community at the junction of Big Coon and Little Coon roads. It has been remodeled and is the home of the Fred Matthews family.

The original road to the old home place ran between a cemetery and the front of the house. She has been told, however, that when the limestone "pike" was built in 1910 it was "put behind the house, so the back elevation became the ap-

proach to the house. The pike came from Fackler, but I'm not sure to where. Some roads back then just ended somewhere. The roads that went on up to Crow Mountain were just dirt roads, not pikes."

Her dad, Leroy, lived in the Carns area when he married her mother, Martha Elizabeth, who was living at home along with a younger sister, helping their father after their mother died. Leroy and Martha Elizabeth also lived in the Inglis home after they married. Leroy helped Grandfather Inglis farm his land. Actually, "He more or less just managed the farm, since he had a mail route out from Fackler to Crow Mountain. He delivered the mail using a buggy." However, Leroy had his eye on a house with about two hundred acres in the Fairfield community, and when Rubilee was four years old, he and his wife purchased that property, using Martha Elizabeth's inheritance as a down payment. "It wasn't a log house, but for a house at that time it was a right good house. It wasn't all that big. It only had five rooms, but they were huge, and I think there were fourteen foot ceilings. The house was ell-shaped, and it was hard to heat, even with a fireplace as well as a stove in the kitchen. Of course, it had an outside privy. We used oil lamps until gasoline lamps were available. They were so much brighter for reading. We had two of them, and they used car gasoline. The house is gone now. My sister tore it down when she built a new house near it."

Rubilee had three siblings. "Sammie was the oldest, and she is twenty months older than I. My mother was very devoted to her father, and she expected her first child would be a boy and would be named Samuel Brown. But the baby was a little girl, and mother was not going to be outdone, so she

named her Sammie. My younger sister, Edith, was born in 1919, and my brother Trester was born in 1922." Sammie and Rubilee were born before the family moved from Grandfather Inglis's house. Edith and Trester were born afterwards.

Mr. Moore raised some of the usual things on his farm. Cotton and corn were his cash crops, and the latter was also used to feed the large number of livestock. He also raised a good bit of grain, which most of the other farmers did not do. Rubilee remembers that he would have the wheat ground. She did not do much of the work in the fields, but she did do some cotton picking. Once she had to weigh cotton for the pickers. Her major chores were mostly around the house. "We had a well pump, and my brother and sisters and I had to get the water. Mother usually had help with the laundry, but we had to do the ironing. We also had to feed the chickens and gather the eggs. And I remember that in canning season we would peel, peel, peel. My dad had a huge orchard, and we canned everything imaginable. We also worked in the garden, but my daddy almost always had good help."

The helpers were tenant farmers and their families. "There were three tenant houses. One of them was a log house with two big rooms and a dogtrot in the middle and an added lean-to. Two of them are just dilapidated now, but one is still standing. One of the tenant families she fondly remembers was the Tollivers, one of the few black families in the area. "They were a good family, just part of the group around. We didn't know any difference in the races at that time. One time Bob Tolliver said to me, 'If I could just learn the multiplication tables, I think I could make it all right.' I said, 'I can teach you the multiplication tables.' So as a result I taught

him the multiplication tables in the cotton patch. Years later, when I was looking at a teaching job in Scottsboro, one of the members of board didn't know me, and Bob was working for him at the time. I don't know why the man mentioned it to Bob about whether they should hire me or not, but Bob said, 'Well, I guess she is a pretty good teacher if she can teach multiplication tables to a black man in the cotton fields,' and I got that man's vote. Bob and his wife, Francis, lived on the lower part of the farm and worked for daddy over twenty-three years. They had a bunch of boys, and he wanted his boys to 'learn enough to know how to do.' I think they did, because they have all done well. His brother is the one that had the meat market in Scottsboro."

Although blacks were not numerous in that area when she was growing up, there were enough to have a black school about two miles from where she lived, and a black cemetery was just up from their house.

Rubilee did not have many neighbors when she was growing up, or at least not many children for neighbors. "On one side was Mr. Albert Campbell, and he had no children. On the other side was Mr. T. L. Green, and he didn't have any children, either. And then beyond that there were two large land owners. So we did not have any close neighbor children except those that were tenants on the place. We would visit some of them on Sunday afternoons, and they would come and visit us. It didn't make much difference except for one thing. Momma was a stickler about how we talked, and she wouldn't let us talk like them. I thought it was great to learn words like 'ain't' and 'his'n,' but I was not allowed to say them." The Moore kids did have "a big family in this area

when we were growing up. My father had seven brothers and sisters, and there were ten in mother's family, but only five lived to adulthood. So we had cousins here and cousins there, aunts and great aunts, and so forth, and we did lots of visiting back and forth."

There were no stores in the Fairfield community. "It was definitely a rural area, because there were two large farms there, and it was about a mile to a little country store. And I don't remember much being in the Carns area. But there were stores in Fackler. The McGuffeys had one, and C. A. Wilson had one, which is still there. Morris Brown also had a store, and he was postmaster at Carns as well. I remember my mother mentioning going to the drugstore in Fackler that was owned by Mr. Sam McCrary, who was the grandfather of Imogene Hodges, the wife of Dr. Durwood Hodges senior. Before we moved, my family did most of our shopping in Fackler. After we moved, we did most of it in Hollywood. I remember Mr. Frank Gullatt, one of the big landowners, had a large general store there, and the building is still standing. Mr. Hal Hurt was another big landowner, and his grandchildren still own the land. We didn't get to Scottsboro often when we were growing up, but we did order a lot from Sears."

The Moore family did not have a car when Rubilee was in her early years. "We rode in buggies when we were real small, and my dad used a wagon to haul his produce and things. But then we got a T Model Ford, which was what most everybody had. I believe that was about 1926, but it was not the first car in which I had ridden. My mother's brother got one early. We had a neighbor who had a car, and when we needed to go somewhere my daddy would hire him

to take us. Back then, trains went through Hollywood and Fackler, so they were big. When I was about eight, I had a very serious blood stream infection and was carried to the hospital in Chattanooga. That was the first train I ever rode."

Rubilee remembers her father as a good moral person and has learned to appreciate him more as she has matured. "My dad was not much of a disciplinarian. Actually, he was a hard man to understand. He was so involved with the farm he did not take much time with us, because he was working so hard. Not too long after he bought the farm, a little depression hit in this area. And then after that he was getting things going well when the big depression hit. I didn't know it then, but they thought they might lose the farm. I was still at home, and it was so rough because we didn't have any money. They had a Federal Landbank loan, and it was all he could do during the big depression to meet that loan. Although we didn't have any money, we didn't lack for food since we lived in the country. I can see now why he might not have had much time for us." He let her mother keep them in line, and according to Rubilee, she did a good job of this.

"For entertainment when we were growing up," she says, "we worked! My parents, and my mother particularly, had a strong work ethic, and we were always made to feel we had to excel. We did play some of the usual childhood games, and we had a battery operated radio and would listen to some of the programs on it. Overall, though, I would say we had a happy childhood. We didn't have a great deal, but nobody else around here had much either. We did have all the things we needed, I'm sure."

Rubilee started to the Fairfield School when she was five

years old. It had one room and one teacher and was about a mile from their house. She had to walk except when the weather was bad, and then her father would take her and the others. The first building had burned, and a new building was built the summer before her first year. She remembers that the students had to provide their own desks, and her father bought two new desks, one for her and one for Sammie, her sister. The school was heated with coal. "It was unusual to start at five, but I worried my mother because I wanted to do everything my older sister did, and she was already going to school. The one room school worked amazingly well. There were no serious discipline problems. We were supposed to be doing homework while the teacher was working with other classes. But sometimes I would get bored, and in the second grade I would watch the third grade and work along with them."

School went from about eight until three, and "We started in November, since this was an agricultural society, and kids had to help gather the crops. I remember we went for seven months, but we went the first two months to Hollywood, since they had a nine month session. There were just a few in my class in the one room school, maybe two or three, but less than six. Different teachers came through the school. Ms. Chambers, who just turned one hundred years old, was my second grade teacher there."

Schooling for the Moore children did not stop when classes were out. There was a considerable amount of what she calls "home teaching." Both sides of the family were education-oriented, and she credits her family with impressing upon her the importance of learning. Her grandmother Moore was

a teacher, and her father had an uncle who was a principal in Lenoir City, Tennessee. She was told that her father had stayed there with his uncle and had gone to school a "good bit," and for his time he was "pretty well educated." Her mother had also been a teacher before she raised her family. "They had something like an extension, and professors would come there, and that is how she became a teacher."

Her mother was the one who made sure she got her homework done, and the home schooling didn't stop after school ended for the year. "Every summer she always had certain things we had to learn. In third grade, we had to learn multiplication tables that summer. After the fifth grade, we had to learn all the states and capitols, and I still remember them. I never shall forget that on one rainy summer day, I said I wished I had something to do, and she said 'just get your books,' and I said 'I'm not going to do it.' I didn't mean to sass her. Well, I didn't say that anymore. And even in summertime we had study period. I think we all wanted an education."

The Fairfield School only went through the sixth grade, then they went to Hollywood for junior high. Usually they would ride to the Hollywood School, about three miles away, with some of the older students. It was a nine month school, and there were less than ten in each class. There was only one teacher for the three junior grades, however. Although there were a few departmental classes, they spent most of the time in that one room. Ordinarily she would have gone through the ninth grade at this school, but Sammie had come to Jackson County High School in Scottsboro for the tenth grade, so Rubilee came with her at the beginning of the ninth grade.

She vividly remembers riding the school bus to Scottsboro.

"The bus came up County Road 33. Most of the roads were chert, and since there was no air conditioning we had to ride with the windows open. Dust got all over us, and we would get to school with dust all in our hair. The Scottsboro kids, in contrast, looked neat and trim. But students from town not accepting the ones bused in from the pike never bothered me too much. I guess I was determined to make my place. Maybe the kids thought I was getting kind of pushy or something. The first year we had to make a speech in English, and some of the kids decided they were going to make me mess up, so they made all kinds of faces at me as I made my speech. The teacher was in back, so she didn't see them. It turned out that I was the only one to make an A, so they just decided to accept me. Eventually, I did make friends there, and I would visit them down here, and they would come out to the country. After riding in that dusty bus, though, I always said that if I ever have any children, I hope they will never have to ride in a bus. Fortunately, I've had three, and they never had to."

She went to Jackson County High School in Scottsboro from the ninth through the twelfth grade. The high school at that time was where Page School is now. There were not very many extracurricular activities, but she does remember a history club, a Latin club, a science club, and athletic clubs. She was "interested in the history club, mainly, since I have always been a 'history buff.'" Of course, she had to take her own lunch to school, usually sandwiches. "We had gotten too sophisticated to take sausage and biscuits," so instead they had egg salad sandwiches, ham sandwiches, cheese sandwiches, and a cupcake or other kind of sweet. She reluctantly

admits to having "maybe one or two boyfriends in high school, but no serious ones."

The Great Depression had a huge impact on her senior year. Her family had almost no money, so even buying shoes for school was a financial burden on her family. The summer before her last year, she made four bedspreads, each of which was time-consuming because all the tufting had to be done by hand. However, she got seventy five cents for each one, which enabled her to buy a pair of shoes for the winter.

But the impact was felt by the school system as well. Before the B.B. Comer Bridge was built, students from the Section area of Sand Mountain went to Pisgah. After it was completed, these students came to Jackson County High School. As a result, about 125 students were in her senior class in the fall of 1932.

After about three months, however, public schools were forced to close because of insufficient funds. "Our principal and our teachers felt bad about this, especially for the seniors, so they hit upon an idea. The principal offered the teachers a script, not money but a script for sixty dollars a month if they would stay there. The script was good if they could get it cashed, but it was questionable whether or not they could. There was also a fee of \$2.50 a month for each student, so a number of them had to drop out, since they could not afford to pay the fee or had no way to get to school. This meant that many of them didn't finish until the next year. I was able to go on because Mrs. Nannie Skelton, who lived next to the present daycare on Scott Street, offered many scholarships, and I got one of them. The only way I was able to get to school was with a man who lived nearby who worked

with the state highway department, so I rode with him.”

Despite the hardships, though, she did graduate on time in 1933, but there were only fifty-six in her graduation class. She was the valedictorian, which she attributes to her “enjoyment of school and home-schooling” as well as the fact that “kids in town had more to do than we did in the country, and I enjoyed reading and studying.” The last class reunion was in 1993, and “We have lost so many in the last few years.”

Church was an important part of the Moore family’s life when she was growing up, and it continues to be an integral part of her existence. Her father was a dedicated Cumberland Presbyterian, but the church outside of Hollywood had closed. Her mother was a Baptist, so they attended the Baptist Church in Hollywood. Services were held only once a month, so they attended the Methodist Church in Hollywood during its monthly service.

Sometimes though, her father would drop the rest of the family off and come down to Scottsboro to hear Judge John Tally’s grandfather teach Sunday School in the Presbyterian Church. Rubilee joined the Baptist Church and was baptized in the Tennessee River, near where the B. B. Comer Bridge is now. Later on, when she joined the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in Scottsboro, “My pastor said, ‘now you are back where you belong,’ and I felt that way too, because I had always heard my daddy talk about the Cumberland Presbyterian Church.”

She began her teaching career immediately after graduating (a passing grade on an examination was all that was nec-

essary to teach at that time). Her first job was in Estill Fork in a two room school with two teachers. The school session lasted seven months, and it went through the sixth grade. She boarded across from the Prince store, just beyond the Prince house. She taught there one year, then taught in the Kyles School near the Moody brick house. “I came there because salaries were so low, and I could stay at home and teach there.” She remembers that she would have to borrow the first two months of salary so she could go to college during the summer, and “Mr. Rice Jacobs wouldn’t question us. He just lent us the money.” The Kyles School had one room, and she taught six grades. But she “felt isolated, and I missed association with people of my own age.”

While teaching at Kyles, mutual friends introduced her to Harrison Smith, who had come from Birmingham with the Resettlement Administration. After two years of teaching at Kyles, they married. She was twenty-one years old. During the next few years, they moved several times, including stints in Tuscaloosa, Selma, and Brunswick, Georgia, and she didn’t teach again until after they moved back to Scottsboro. “In 1951, Mr. Delbert Hicks, who was the superintendent of the county schools, called me about teaching in Dutton, since somebody had resigned. He said I would be teaching science, social studies, English, and girls’ physical education in junior high. I told him I was not a science person, but he said it was elementary science. When I look back, I think that was the best year of my teaching. Mr. Grady Thomas, Fred Thomas’s daddy, was the principal. He was very stern, and much learning went on in that school. If any parent were going to come down on a teacher, he took care

of it. They didn't get past the office." She rode to Dutton with Mr. Tom Hodge, who had a mail route there. His family had moved to Scottsboro because his daughter, Jane, who had just finished the ninth grade in Dutton, was an excellent math student, and Mr. Thomas had suggested they move to Scottsboro so she could attend school there.

She only taught in Dutton a year because her husband, now with TVA, was gone much of the time, and she needed to stay home with her young children. But in 1955, there was a sudden need for a fifth grade teacher at Central School in Scottsboro (at the corner of Broad and Charlotte, where Helig-Meyers is now), so she taught there for two years, then "retired" again.

In 1962, though, her teaching career resumed, this time with a new twist. "A group of families who had children with special needs decided they would form a retarded children's association in order to find somebody to have a training program for these children. So Dr. Pepper, who was a member of that association, approached me about taking the group, and I told him I had never been around children with those kinds of needs. But Dr. Pepper has a way of making you feel like you need to do something. He places confidence in you. He told me basic needs of these children were not too different from ours. Anyway, I ended up doing some workshops, and with his help, and with that of Fred Buchheitt, the editor of the paper, Kenneth Devers, Johnnie Bell, Bob Gentry, Jim Pitt, Vera Turner, and the parents, we started this program. For two years it was private, because there were no funds in public education for students with special needs. The sessions were held in the old fairgrounds, across from

Dr. Sanders's office. It was not a school, just a training program for children who were not educable."

After a couple of years, the program was incorporated into the school system, and she had to go to Peabody for two summers to get certification. She was incorporated into the public schools as well, and she taught special education classes at Brownwood for eleven years. She retired for good in 1975 for two main reasons. Harrison, her husband, had just retired, and she would have had to go back to school to meet requirements for recertification. As she says, "I had about all the school I could take."

Family has always been important to Rubilee, and she is proud that she was not the only one of the four siblings who took advantage of their "home-schooling" and formal education. Her older sister, Sammie, taught for awhile, then married James Preston Brown. They had one daughter. In 1940, they moved to Sheffield, where he worked for Southern Railway. Her husband died young, and she resumed her teaching career after her daughter started to school. Sammie still lives in Sheffield. Their younger sister, Edith, was a good mathematician, and developed an early interest in accounting. She graduated from high school at fifteen and became the first female CPA in Tennessee. She had her own business in Chattanooga, but after retirement she had some health problems and moved back to the farm and built a house there. She never married and died in 1996. Her brother, Trester, stayed on the farm and ran it after their father died. He also bought an adjoining farm. In 1995, he fell off a tractor and died. The coroner ruled he had a heart attack. His daughter

lives in the house Edith built. Rubilee's father died in 1944 at the age of fifty-seven from liver cancer. Her mother lived on the farm for a total of fifty-seven years, until she went into a nursing home. She died in 1982 when she was ninety-four years old. Harrison, Rubilee's husband, died in 1984 after several years of poor health.

Rubilee has three children. Her older daughter, Martha Swope, was born in 1942. She lives in Marietta, Georgia. Her younger daughter, Suzanne Watford, was born in 1946. She lives in Dothan and has one daughter. Her son Mike was born in 1957. He lives in Scottsboro and has two children.

Ms. Smith has continued to stay busy since she quit teaching. She has been heavily involved in the affairs of the Scottsboro Cumberland Presbyterian Church and has been its unofficial historian for years. She has been involved in researching the history of Cumberland Presbyterian churches in Jackson County and has a particular interest in the history of the only black Cumberland Presbyterian church in the county (located between Fackler and Stevenson). After she quit teaching, she got very interested in genealogy. Her desire to become a member of the DAR led her to research her Revolutionary War ancestors, which she did successfully. For the past several months, she has lived at the Southern Estates assisted living complex in Scottsboro, but her physical limitations have somewhat stymied her ability to follow some of her interests.

Rubilee's teaching background became even more obvious

when I took her a rough draft of the above story of her life. She kept it for several days and told me she read through it four times. She added many details, but she mostly corrected it as a teacher would a term paper. She was particularly critical of any syntactical errors contained in the sections in which she was quoted. She even suggested that I bring my tape recorder over, since so many changes needed to be made. I did, and we went over each page as she dictated changes. Her attention to detail was remarkable, and I appreciated her input.

Early on in our acquaintance, Rubilee indicated a desire to take me on a tour of the area and the places she mentioned in our conversations. Of course, I was eager to do this as well. So one cold January morning I picked her up at about eleven thirty, loading her and her wheelchair into my car. Over the next four hours, I got a guided tour by someone extremely knowledgeable about northwestern Jackson County. We went places and saw things I never knew existed.

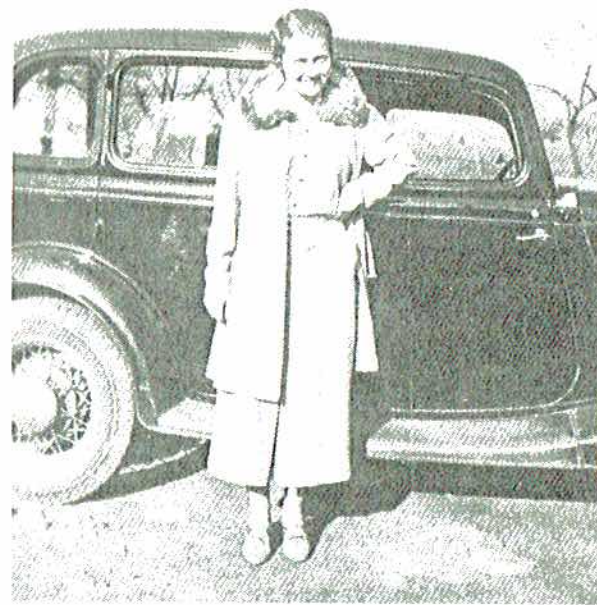
We started out on Jackson County Route 33 through Pikeville, then to the Fairfield community, where her parents' home and farm had been. She also pointed out the location of the Fairfield church and school. We then drove by the old Moody brick home, just north of Kyles, now undergoing restoration. Next was the animal zoo (a collection of boulders painted like various animals) on Route 32, followed by a stop at the Inglis family cemetery on Route 39. Near the cemetery, we took a short road (Route 239) until it dead-ended. It was at this point, Rubilee informed me, the stagecoach stopped many years ago. Across the road is an old cemetery, and legend has it that the cemetery holds the remains of victims of small pox from that era.

We then took Route 42 and turned north on Route 55. Al-

most immediately, in the Roaches Cove area, she pointed out the spot where the old brick house (her birthplace) had been located. After crossing Big Coon Creek, we turned left on Route 53 and went several miles to an immense horse farm owned by one of Rubilee's cousins. We then backtracked on Route 53 to the Rash area, where she pointed out the Austin House (one of the three original brick houses) as well as another brick house that has the same facade as the one owned by her grandfather Inglis. After a short detour through Stevenson, we headed back to Scottsboro.

During our trip, I commented on the relatively sparse population and the apparent isolation of the countryside we visited. She agreed, but added that this was not the case when she was growing up—there were many more people back then, so it did not seem so isolated. After we returned, I was glad that I had marked our route on a Jackson County map and indicated on the map where the various sites were located. Otherwise, I could not have possibly remembered where everything was.

Rubilee had been as congenial a tour guide as she was during my taping sessions with her. She is a repository of information on the history of Jackson County, a fine lady, and a wonderful person to have known.



*Rubilee Smith in
1936*



Rubilee Smith in 2000

SUE MAE FREEMAN POWELL

Sue Mae Freeman Powell's life span and the final century of the millennium are almost a perfect fit. She was born on February 10, 1903, ten months before the Wright Brothers made the first airplane flight. Now, in 1999, the century and the millennium are almost history, but Sue Mae (as everyone calls her) is still going strong.

I had never formally met Sue Mae until the first time I visited her home with a tape recorder. Of course, I had heard about her—she is one of the best known persons in Scottsboro and is practically a legend in her own time. I had seen her on



Ms. Sue Mae Freeman Powell about 25 years old

several occasions and had even heard her give a talk to the Rotary club eight or ten years ago. At that time, I was greatly impressed by her regal bearing, assured manner, appearance and alertness; she certainly did not appear to be pushing ninety years old. She opened her talk by stating, "I've never been out with this many men before," after which she read some of her poems and gave a short, entertaining talk. Naturally, everyone loved her, and she got a tremendous ovation.

I knew I wanted to interview Sue Mae, but was not certain that she would be up to it. So I called her daughter, Martha Foster, who assured me that "Mother was still Mother," and she arranged for me to visit with her.

Sue Mae lives in a well-kept wood frame house on Martin Street, across from the Baptist Church and near the square downtown (she has lived in this house seventy-one years). A note on the front door asks visitors to wait until she has time to get to the door. She was using a walker, the result of a fall several weeks prior. She looked exactly as I remembered her from years ago, still immaculately groomed and attired. She was almost wrinkle-free and could easily have passed for someone decades younger.

After inviting me to take a seat, she proceeded to go through a packet of papers covered with handwriting. These were some of the poems she has written over the years, and she was pleased to read some of them to me. I quickly ascertained that this was a remarkable lady, still functioning at the highest level and still as gracious as ever.

We spent any number of hours conversing about her life, particularly the years growing up in Paint Rock Valley. Her memory was so acute and her ability to express herself so well-

formed that her story is presented entirely in her own words. All I did was organize the material into a more coherent whole.

I was born on a hill in Princeton, Alabama, on February 10, 1903. Dr. Stanley, the only doctor in Princeton, delivered me in our house. This house burned when I was very young, so then we lived across the road, not the street, from my grandfather's store in Princeton. The center of Princeton has moved, it's not where it was when I grew up. It used to be on a road that turned left across the bridge over Lick Fork when you went up the valley toward Swaim.

My father was James Minor Freeman. His family lived on Lick Fork. Paint Rock valley has all these coves, and there are springs that form creeks that run out from the coves, and all these creeks merge to form the Paint Rock River. Lick Fork is one of these creeks, and he grew up on a farm near this creek. The town of Princeton and the village of Lick Fork were not too far apart. There were eleven children in my father's family. The farm they lived on belonged to a friend and was always their home. They gave part of their crop to the owner as their rent.

My father's father was very high-strung and high tempered. He didn't have much patience with people who didn't agree with him. One time, we grandchildren were playing at the edge of a field where he was plowing, and there was a cliff, and blackberry vines were hanging over. I was the oldest and tallest, and I was reaching up to get some berries when I heard some noise. Grandpa was out in the middle of the field,

and I heard him screaming "Don't do that!" I dropped my hand and he came running, and the noise I had been hearing was a rattlesnake, coiled right up on a vine where I was going to put my hand. He had heard that rattlesnake from where he was.

My father's mother died when I was a child, and the Sue in my name is for her. So my grandfather married again, and this grandmother was the only one we ever knew. We loved her and she loved us. It was a happy situation family-wise always.

My mother and my father went to the same school in Princeton and knew each other growing up. Her maiden name was Daisy Enochs. Her mother was a Bridges, a large and influential family with a large family farm just south of Princeton. Two Bridges brothers were killed in the Civil War, and Aunt Sally Bridges's fiance was also killed. She never married, we just called her Aunt Sally. My grandfather on my mother's side was Demetrius Vespasius Enochs. He was from Winchester, Tennessee, and went to a college in Winchester. He was the only college educated person in our family at that time. I don't know how he had those two unusual names. Everybody called him Demetrius, so I didn't think there was anything unusual about it when I was growing up. It was only after I began to study history that I realized that those names came from Greece and Rome. I don't know how he met my grandma Bridges or how he happened to wind up in Paint Rock Valley.

We lived across from my grandfather Enochs's store until I was twelve. He also had the post office. I practically grew

up in his store. He had some books there, and when he didn't have any customers he would read to me. He taught me how to read by the time I was five. He taught me so many things in the Bible, and I memorized many verses, things I still remember. Grandpa bought me the first book that was all mine. He had been to Huntsville, and he had bought "Alice in Wonderland." I was so thrilled, that was my first book. That book got me into trouble one day. It was wash day, and momma sent me to get some things upstairs and bring them down. I saw my book up there, I had practically memorized it, so I picked it up and lay down across the bed and was reading it. I forgot all about why I was up there. She didn't spank me, but she gave me a tongue lashing.

Grandpa Enochs had the post office in his store, so he was the town postmaster. The mail would go by train to Paint Rock. The man who carried the mail had a surrey, and people who got off the train and wanted to go up the valley would ride with him. It was about fifteen miles from Paint Rock to where we lived. He would get to the store about two o'clock with the mail, and grandpa would then sort it. He had this box on the wall with places for the mail labeled with initials, not names. He would take out the mail and call out the names, and I would put it in the right boxes. I didn't realize I was working for Uncle Sam. I put the mail up nearly every day. The man who carried the mail went on up the valley to Swaim and other places, and it would be late when he got up there. If you needed to go to Paint Rock, you could go back with him in his surrey, which really did have a fringe on top.

People who came up with the mail courier, and almost everybody else who needed a place to stay, spent the night at

my grandfather Enochs's house. A lot of people came there, and when they enlarged the school, some of the teachers boarded there. A vivid memory in my life was one such visitor. This strange looking man came, and he needed to spend the night. He was a dark man, not a Negro, but with dark skin, a heavy dark moustache, black hair and dark eyes. I was a little afraid of him, I had never seen a man that looked like that. Well, he was what they called a pack-peddler. He was from a little village in north Iran. I've been to that area where he came from, and I have thought so many times how he got from there to Paint Rock Valley.

I got all the favors for being the first grandchild. One time my cousin, who was two years younger, and I were sitting on a little porch at the end of the store. Grandpa was sitting in a straight chair tilted back against the wall. Mr. Alec Clay, one of the prominent men in the community, drove up in a fine buggy pulled by a horse with a good-looking shiny harness. He got out, and he had a gold chain across his tummy with a big watch on it. He walked up to where grandpa was, he was always so friendly, and said, "Demetrius, these are two fine looking grandchildren you have here," and grandfather said, "Yes, and each one has already eaten me out of five dollars worth of candy." And then I felt guilty because I was afraid I was imposing on Grandpa.

I was so fortunate in having two sets of grandparents I grew up with, and I am reminded so many times of things they taught me, and of the things they probably tried to teach me, that have stood with me all through life.

My father was a wonderful father. He didn't have too much

education, but he believed in all his children getting one. He believed that when Sunday came you went to church, and you did all the right things, if you owed something you paid it. When you wanted something, and if you didn't have the money to pay for it, you didn't need it. You paid for what you used and for what you got. He was strong in discipline, but he was so loving with it. Fortunately, I never suffered from any of his discipline, but the others did, especially the boys. He had his ideals of what a boy should do and work and so on. After I was grown, two men who knew him told me in essence that they never heard him say a curse word or heard a criticism out of his mouth that was unjust.

My mother was the ideal mother. She was one who certainly loved her children, and wanted the very best for their benefit. The sixth grade was how far she went in school, and she wanted her children to have more education than that. The school in Princeton only went to the sixth grade. Huntsville was the nearest town you could go past the sixth grade, and not many did that. She made sure you did your homework, and she had you memorize your Sunday School verses on Saturday.

I had six brothers and sisters. I was the oldest. The next, two years younger, was Serena Estelle. The Serena came from my mother's mother. She never liked that name because when she went to school, the children never said Serena, they said Srenee. When she was born, she had dark hair, and daddy called the rest of us towheads. My uncle said she looked like a Gypsy, so she started being called Gypsy. Finally it was shortened to Gyp, and she died being known as Gyp. She and I were very close, we were the first two children. But she had

quite a different disposition from me. She was one of those who would fly off the handle, and she let you know what she thought. And she was more the outdoor type, she loved to go to the field, and I had no inclination for that. She had one son who lives in Tennessee.

The third child was William Howard, about five years younger than me. I remember being at the Presbyterian church when he was a baby. A woman came up and wanted to see the baby and asked his name, and when momma told her it was William Howard, she said, "Oh you named him for the President," who was William Howard Taft. My mother just flew apart and said, "I would never name any child after a Republican President." Then he got the name Bubba somehow, and I never liked that.

Lucy Blanche was the next girl. The Lucy was for momma's sister, and Blanche was for the daughter of Dr. Stanley, who lived next door. She was a very talented one and painted the roses in that picture in my living room. And she always had a lot of boyfriends.

Stella Gray was the fourth girl. Papa named her. There was a friend he and momma had, her name was Stella. Maybe he just liked the name Gray. She was more of an outdoor girl and liked to go to the field, and even plow if poppa would let her. Later on, she became expert in handwork. I have some lovely embroidery things she did.

After Stella Gray came the last sister, Vivian Pauline, and I named her for a teacher I admired so much. She is the only one of the girls left, and she lives in Huntland, Tennessee. She went to high school in Winchester, Tennessee, after my family moved there. My brother James was born the first

year I was away in school, and I named him James Minor, that was for my father. I was eighteen, so I didn't grow up with him. He is in Chicago now and is not in good health. We tease each other a lot. The first year I taught, he sent me a picture of an Indian suit from the Sears catalog that he wanted for Christmas, and so I got one for him.

When I was twelve, we moved from downtown, you might say, over to the Bridges farm where Grandma and Grandpa Enochs lived. My father had been farming somewhere else, but after we moved, the farm he worked was my mother's family farm and was next to grandpa's. He didn't own it though. It was my mother's family farm. It was about two miles below Princeton, in Bridges Cove across the Paint Rock River. We lived in a house up the hill looking over the farm. My daddy farmed by the almanac, when to plant and when not to plant. He raised corn and cotton, and we gardened and had pigs and chickens and cows. I picked cotton, hoed cotton, pulled corn, all those things. He always had a young calf that he would fatten up, and in the fall he would slaughter it. We had no way to keep the meat, so it was divided out to different families, and then in a few weeks later another family would do the same thing, and so on.

One thing I remember so well, Papa always had several cows. When the grass began to come out, he would keep the milk cows home, and all the others we would take up on the mountain to Jane White's farm. No one lived on the land, but there was a beautiful spring, and poppa would herd the cattle up there and leave them along with some salt. Afterwards, we would stop at a smaller spring and have a picnic.

Mama fixed food for us, bacon to fry over an open fire, boiled eggs, and of course mama always had cookies or something. My father knew every bush and every tree and every wildflower, and that was so interesting. We didn't just walk along, he pointed out all these things to us. Many times he took us up to Lick Fork where his parents lived, and he would teach us how to swim. He would put out a trot line, and I went with him in a canoe to put the line out. We would go the next morning to get the fish.

To get to school or to church, we walked down the hill, down the narrow lane which was between two fields, crossed the river at Bridges Ford on a log bridge, and then walked up the pike, as it was called. Back then, logs were floated down the river to Paint Rock, and some of the afternoons when the river had an overflow of logs, they would hang on the foot bridge. There would be a solid mass of them, and when we crossed the river we would jump on these logs, one to another. Why some of us didn't get killed or crippled, I don't know.

The valley is very narrow and the mountains are steep, and after a hard rain the water would rush down those mountains into the river. There used to be more water and the river was larger than it is now. When this happened while we were at school, the water would be running over the log bridge and we could not cross it. But my daddy would be waiting for us on the other side with a mule named Emma. He would lead her down to the edge of the water, put the stirrups across the saddle, and slap her. I would call Emma, and there was one place where she would have to swim, but that was short.

When she got to our side, I took hold of the reins and got up on the saddle, and one or two of the children, depending on their size, would get on Emma, and we would cross. Papa would take that load off, and I'd return and ferry all the children across the river. There were three other families that lived across the river, and we would ferry their children, too. If the river was way too high, we had to go all the way up to the bridge at Graham's crossing to get to the other side. We didn't think about how dangerous it was, we had fun crossing that river, and I felt so important getting up on the horse and taking the children to the other side. That was just our way of life. We grew up taught to be self-sufficient and to do what we could as best as we could.

Everywhere we went, we had to walk or ride in a wagon. If you had the money to afford it, you had a surrey, but most of the time we traveled in a wagon. The road to Paint Rock, called the Pike, was a good road; it was not rough. When you got off that road in some areas, though, it would be rough. The pike went on to Swaim and Estill Fork, then up to Tennessee. There was not a road to Skyline at that time.

Grandpa had the only store in Princeton for a long time. The closest one was down in Trenton. Then Mr. Newt Walker had a store, and in time his became the largest, and the post office was in his store after grandpa moved to Tennessee. There were no clothing stores, so we had to make the majority of our own or order from a catalog. My mother and grandmother were seamstresses. They had a loom, and they wove woolen blankets and a lot of other things. They sewed nearly everything, and I guess I inherited a liking for it, because I still make things. The first money I ever earned was when I

made a dress for a neighbor and she paid me seventy five cents. We also ordered some clothes from Sears and from Dunnnavants in Huntsville. When we needed new shoes for the winter, about when the cotton was picked and ready to take to the gin, daddy would load cotton on the wagon. The day before he took it there, he would take each one of us, and he would put our foot on a piece of cardboard, and he took a pencil and drew an outline of our feet. The next morning he would leave at three o'clock and drive to Paint Rock, where the only gin was. He wanted to get there early so he wouldn't have to wait in line. While in Paint Rock, he would go into the Butler and Russo store and buy our new shoes. We were all so happy to have new shoes, and I can't remember that we ever cried because one hurt our feet.

We didn't know what electricity was, we may have read about it. At night, we used kerosene lamps. We didn't have running water, and we bathed in a galvanized tub. It was mother's philosophy that before you went anywhere you took a bath and put on clean clothes, so we used that tub often. Our facilities were outside, we never heard of an inside one.

When we were growing up, we never had to pile three or four to a bed, we were always comfortable. Serena and I always slept together, and my brother had a bed to himself. We had those woven wool blankets on our bed during the winter. Serena liked all the cover on her, and after I went to sleep, I would throw all my extra cover over on her. I didn't like that much cover.

At Christmas, since I was the oldest and knew there wasn't a Santa Claus, I had to see that each one of us had a clean stocking and to hang them. We wore long black cotton stock-

ings. That's all we wore for socks in those days. So that is what I used. I didn't hang them by the fireplaces, since there were beds in those rooms. Near the front door was a place to hang hats, and that is where I hung the stockings. Momma said it was more convenient for Santa to come in there than down the chimney. There were two things you could count on. We all got oranges. I still associate oranges with Christmas, because that was the only time of the year we had them. And we always had candy. We didn't have toys much, but we always got things we enjoyed. I always had an extra doll in the top of my stocking. Everybody would wake up and run, tumbling over each other to see what Santa had brought. They believed in Santa, and they thought since they had been good, they deserved those things.

I didn't get out of the valley very often. You had to go to Paint Rock to get out of the valley that way. The first time I remember going to Paint Rock was when a photographer was to be there. So my mother's sister and her family and our family went to have pictures made. I was about six, and I saw my first train there, too. I saw my first car in 1914 just where you cross the Princeton bridge and the road splits. It was a Ford sedan. I first rode in a car when I was sixteen or seventeen. The first time I went to Scottsboro was in 1917. I went on the train from Paint Rock, and that was my first train ride. I had an aunt who lived there, and I just went over for a visit in the summer. Going to Huntsville back then was like going to New York now.

We may not have gotten out of Paint Rock Valley much, and of course we didn't have radios, but we were not completely isolated. My grandpa took the Atlanta paper, I believe

it came three days a week. And part of the time we got a paper from Scottsboro, but I can't remember that it was a regular one. After grandpa moved to Tennessee, there were two papers from Nashville, one Democrat and one Republican. He was such a dyed-in-the-wool Democrat, he wouldn't let the Republican paper be brought into the house.

And there were community activities, too. More people lived in the valley than live there now. There were community programs put on by the churches or the school. I remember one play we were putting on at school. This young man was home from college, and he was the hero and I was the heroine. He was supposed to kiss me, and I shall never forget, he had big brown eyes. He leaned over like he was going to kiss me but of course he didn't, and I was scared to death for fear he would.

It was a particular custom in our community that on Sunday afternoons the young people would meet at the church and just sit around and talk. You would talk to your boyfriend if you had one. Of course, I had boyfriends. Well, I had more than one for a while. Afterwards, we might go in the church. My sister would play the organ and we would all sing. And we had square dances almost nightly during Christmas week. We had some at our home. I must of been about thirteen or so, and I was watching them dance. A cousin of poppa's was the one who called the dances, and he asked me to dance. I said, "I don't know how," and he said "That's all right, I'll carry you through," so that was my first dance. I loved square dancing. I did it a lot, and I would still love to do it.

I went to school in Princeton. The school was in the

Masonic building. Upstairs was the Masonic Hall, and there were two rooms up there. One of them was always locked, and they told us there was a mean goat in that room. I never did know why they told us that. Downstairs was a one room school. There was just one teacher for a long, long time, and everything from the ABCs on up was taught. School was only held in the summertime and just went for three months. The school at Princeton only went through the sixth grade when I started to school. We went from eight in the morning until four in the afternoon. The room had one big stove in the center and a stage up front. When I was a beginner, I sat on the front row, and each grade sat further back. I can remember my aunt, my mother's younger sister, and one of the boys doing arithmetic up on the stage, and I wondered what in the world they were doing up there. Each class had its own time with the teacher. We studied or did homework while she taught the other classes. Teachers had their desks up on the stage, and there was a bucket on one side that had switches in it. Everyone knew what they were for. I don't remember one ever being used, but everybody knew they would be used if it was necessary.

It was a county school, and we had to buy our own books and supplies. I can remember when five of us were in school, and I would take money and go to the store and buy five penny pencils and five nickel tablets, so each one of us had our own tablet and pencil. I can't say how many students there were total. We didn't have a lunchroom, so we all carried baked sweet potatoes, leftovers from breakfast, biscuits with syrup in a hole, and anything else that would keep. We carried the food in a bucket, and on one side of the room

were hooks to hang coats and hats, and we could put our lunch buckets there.

At recess, the boys would play ball. The building is right at the foot of a hill, and the hill was just covered in grapevines. The boys would go up and cut some of the long grapevines, remove all the leaves and knots, and we would jump rope over the vines. I was good at jumping rope. There was a rail fence down one side of the campus, and we would put some planks through the rails, and we would have a seesaw. We didn't have all the toys to play with the way children do now, but we had all the basic things.

Most of the teachers were local, but we had some from Scottsboro or Sand Mountain or somewhere. These would usually board with my grandmother. We had some excellent teachers. There were a lot of programs of various kinds, and the community was invited to come out. I memorized so many poems I would recite, and we had plays we put on. The teachers would have spelling bees for the community. Grandpa would win in his category, and I usually won in mine, but not always.

We had one teacher who was boarding during World War I. Her fiancée was in the service. I was going up to the post office, and this teacher was sitting on the porch. She asked if I could get her mail for her, and I did. And that was the letter notifying her that her fiancée had died.

While I was in school, they finally started getting into high school grades. The school also got more into winter sessions while I was there. Back then, school was not required, and children didn't come from all the homes because it wasn't convenient or they just couldn't get there, or the parents hadn't

been to school themselves and didn't realize the importance of it. But the number of students did finally increase, and a bus was started from the upper end of the valley. Finally, they had two teachers, one for grammar school and one for high school. This happened while I was still there.

But I couldn't finish there because they didn't have all the classes, and I just went through the eleventh grade at Princeton. Then I went over to Winchester for one semester and came to Scottsboro for my last semester. By this time, my mother's parents were living in Winchester. My Uncle Houston moved up there, because he thought he could do better, and he did. So my grandparents moved there, too, since it was about time for his retirement. They wanted me to come over there and stay with them while I went to school, and I did. They were living about two miles from the school, so I rode in the buggy and drove the horse from the house to school. There were two little boys who lived on the farm, and they rode with me. I would drop them off at the grammar school, then I would go on to the high school. There were always boys who would hitch my horse under the shade. My parents moved to Winchester later on.

I really wanted to graduate in Alabama, and my uncle wanted me to come live with them in Scottsboro and finish there. He was Jesse H. Wheeler, a very famous man. He was from Sand Mountain, and he was a teacher and then superintendent of Jackson County schools for a long time, when I lived with them. He was the one who taught me at Princeton in the sixth grade. He was there two years, and he was the best teacher I ever had. I learned things from him that I never learned from others. His office in Scottsboro was in the court-

house. The school I went to was in the same place Page is now. The first part of that building was a small Baptist college, but then it became a high school. It was a two story building, and some of the rooms were planked. I graduated from high school in 1921. There were eleven in my class, the smallest ever. I think there would have been about ten in my class at Princeton.

My aunt and uncle lived over at the end of Houston Street. I walked up Houston to the corner to the Proctor house, along the side of the square, and to the school. Even now, that is the only school that looks like a school. There are rumors they are going to destroy the school. If they do, I may get a poster and protest.

I remember my school days growing up as happy days. We were doing something that we wanted to do, and needed to do, and we were doing it with what we had.

My mother's family was Methodist and my father's family was Presbyterian. They were the only churches in Princeton. Services were held once a month in each, the first Sunday at the Methodist and the third Sunday at the Presbyterian. These were called "preaching Sundays," and we went to both churches. It was the custom in those days, if someone was holding services in a church nearby, you went. You didn't stop to ask if I belong or whether I believe in them, you went to church.

I grew up in the Methodist Church. We had always gone to Sunday School there, because they didn't have one at the Presbyterian Church. The church itself is historic, much over one hundred years old, and it is still there. It was called

Thompson's Campground. During the Civil War, it was the Thompson family that lived in the valley there, a very prestigious family. One of the Thompson men was an officer, and he was in control of some group, and they camped there. But now the extra name has been dropped, and it is just known as the Methodist Church.

Before we moved to the farm, Grandpa Enochs would come over to his store on Monday morning riding Prince, I can still see the big red horse. He would spend the week at our house just across the road from his store, and then on Saturday night I went home with him. On Sunday morning, he would get shaved and dressed, and granny got me dressed. He was the first one to go to church to see if everything was all right. I was put on Prince behind him, so I rode on Prince to Sunday School every Sunday morning. If it happened to be cold, he built a fire in the potbellied stove, and he got everything in order. The rope to ring the bell came down there inside in one corner, and he would go over and help me ring the bell. Every Sunday morning that was routine, and I felt so important that I could ring the church bell and tell everybody it was time to come to church.

My grandma, Aunt Sally, and mother were the ones who kept the parsonage clean and got it ready for the preacher when he came. Sometimes he would have a houseful of children. Rural ministers in those days got very little pay. My grandpa is the one who kept that church alive in many ways. Before the end of the quarter, he went around and visited all the members. Most of them had not been putting in any money, so at the end of the quarter they would have to pay the preacher. Well, he went to the mill or to the farm or to

where they were in the buggy, and I went with him. I had a little silver mesh bag. I had ordered twelve rolls of Cloverine Salve, and I had sold those. I am sure my family bought most of them. With that money I had bought that bag, and I would put the money in it. I remember going to the mill. The man said, "I'll take over a bushel of corn," and my grandpa said, "He needs a dollar, not corn."

I remember one time we were having a revival all week at our church. My sister and I were playing in the yard, and my parents were sitting on the porch. I remember poppa telling mamma out of the blue that he was going to join her church that night. I know how startled she must have been, for up until then it had not been discussed. Then he said, "The girls are getting old enough now, they will be thinking about joining the church, and I don't want them to have the problem of having to decide whether to go to church with you or with me." Now that tells you something about the character of my dad. That night they had the service. It was the custom to extend the hand of fellowship to new members of the church, and my father was up there. I was sitting in the front row and saw that the head man in the Presbyterian Church did not shake his hand. I can still see my dad put out his hand, and that man just walked by him. I wasn't old enough to make sense out of it, and asked papa why he didn't shake his hand. He said it is just like that person, just passing it off, like it wasn't important. But it impressed me.

Our church had two front doors. The men went in one and the women in the other. The men usually sat on one side and the women on the other, but not always. And there was an "amen corner" just to the right of the pulpit where the

older men sat. I remember there was a greasy spot on the wall there. A man sat there, and he would put his head against the wall, and oil from his hair came off.

On Mother's Day, mother and grandma would cut boxes of red and white roses. She had flowers of all kinds. Grandpa would bring pins from the store. That Sunday I stood at the women's door and a boy named Roy stood at the men's door. We pinned a rosebud on everyone who came in the church. And I was so proud, you know. Everybody who came in said something to me, and I got to know a lot of women I wouldn't have known otherwise.

Aunt Sally, the one who helped keep the parsonage clean, came into the church one day. She was a tall, rather regal lady. She walked up the aisle in her regal way and went to her regular place. She still had her apron on. Before they came to church, my uncle would hitch Huldy the mule to the buggy, while Aunt Sally would finish getting dinner ready for when they got back from church. Of course she did this with an apron on, and she still had it on when she got to church. All of us kids got tickled when we saw her walking in that way of hers with her apron on. When she sat down, she noticed it. She reached around, untied it, and put it down beside her.

Our church was on what was called a circuit. Once a month the pastor would come to our church, and once a month he would go to Bostwick Hill up in the valley, or to Beech Grove, or to Grays Chapel, way above Estill Fork. When they had quarterly conference, it used to be two days. During the conference, church would be held on Saturday. We would have dinner on the ground, and the next morning we would have regular Sunday Service. At one of these con-

ferences, I saw my first presiding elder. He had on a frock-tail coat, and I had never seen one of these before.

We would go up to Bostwick Hill, way up past Swaim towards Estill Fork, when they were having revival. Papa would put hay in the wagon and hitch the mules to it. All the teenagers that wanted to go and the family would pile into the wagon, and we would drive up to that church and attend services up there. Of course, that was part of our social life. I am glad I had the opportunity to share with other people under those circumstances. Children now don't have that.

The services at our church were about like they are now. How fundamental they were depended on the minister. There were no midweek services. Almost everyone in the community went to church, whether they were members or not. We didn't eat at church after the sermon except for special occasions. Everybody went home with somebody for Sunday dinner after church. Sometimes we would have half a dozen extra people at our house. On Sunday afternoon, after the meal, momma would play the organ, and they would just sing hymns. Everybody had such a good time. They were relaxed and doing something they were familiar with and enjoyed doing.

To show you how much things have changed, the first Sunday School lesson I ever taught was when I was seven-teen. For some reason we didn't have a teacher that morning, so I read the lesson. It was about the prodigal son. When I got to the line "fill his belly," the boys began to snicker, you didn't say "belly" back then.

I was eighteen when I graduated from high school in

Scottsboro. Back then, you could take the state examination and get a teachers certificate after you finished high school. So I took the exam the summer after I graduated, and started teaching in Woods Cove that October. I was still only eighteen. At that time, it was common all over the county for the same building to serve as school and church. It was a one room building, and I had ABCs through the seventh grade. Classes were not as big as they are now, because school was not required then. I remember one time I only had three in the seventh grade. I taught two sessions there, and each one was for six months. I boarded with Mr. and Mrs. Wilhelm, who lived just across the road from the school. I got paid sixty dollars a month, and my board was thirty dollars a month. I would come into Scottsboro on weekends, because I still lived with my aunt and uncle. I never did have the opportunity to go to college and stay there, but later on I was able to get two years of college in the summer at Florence State.

After two years at Woods Cove, I moved to the Scottsboro school. At the last minute, one of the teachers who was supposed to come to the city school didn't, so I had the opportunity to come here. There were only two schools in Scottsboro, the county high school and the city grammar school. The grammar school was where Heilig-Meyers is now. I started with the fourth grade. William Sloan was one of my fourth grade pupils the first year I taught there. After that first year I taught sixth grade. None of the schools here was even eight months. We had a wonderful principal of the city school, Elizabeth Monroe from Huntsville, who was determined that we needed an eight month school. She was one that got what

she thought was needed. So I would go with her to the city hall and meet with the men there. She would explain what we needed in a very forceful way. I was the only one of the teachers who would go with her. We had to go several times. Through her we got an eight month school. The next year we went through the same process and got a nine month school in 1923 or 1924.

I still lived with my aunt and uncle. They had built a house up where the old Gay house is now, so I had to walk all the way from there. So did all the teachers. We didn't have any buses. The first school bus that came to Scottsboro came from Tupelo Pike. There was a small summer school up there. They were all primary children, and I had a few in the sixth grade. I saw my first discrimination when that bus came in. The "bus kids," as they were called, were not accepted by the majority of students, but there were some who were kind-hearted. Then when the first buses came from Section and Dutton, mainly the girls were not accepted. I have always been happy how the blacks were accepted.

When I first began teaching school, there were three month summer schools in many of the coves and other outlying areas. I taught summer school in some of these. I taught one in Williams Cove, out from Holly Tree, and another in Grays Chapel, up above Estill Fork. I would board with nearby families, while I taught in these places.

After I taught in Scottsboro, I taught in New Hope, down on the Guntersville highway, for two years. It was a school and church in one building. It only had one room, but it did have a partition of some kind. There were two teachers. I don't remember how much I made, but I was principal, so I

made over sixty dollars a month. I boarded with a family near New Hope but continued to live with my aunt and uncle.

After that, I got married and didn't teach any more until World War II. I was contacted by Mr. Jordan, the principal of the city school. It was just two weeks after school had opened. One teacher's husband had been transferred, and she left. There was a roomful of sixth graders. They had two sections. Mrs. Alspaugh had one of them. My certificate had expired, but Mr. Hodges, the superintendent of the city schools, called. They were desperate. So I was "drafted" and stayed four years. One reason teachers were so scarce, the bullet plant had opened in Huntsville, and they could make so much more money there than teaching school. I never taught again after that.

I got married on the third day of July, 1927, to Ralph Jacob Powell from Langston. I had known him from the church. He was secretary of the Sunday School at the Methodist Church in Scottsboro. The church then was where the post office is now. Then the government wanted to put the post office there. So they sold it and built a brick church over on the corner. Anyway, he was a steward at the church, too. I was in the Epworth League, which all the young people in the church belonged to. The first time I was with him, my sister and I and a friend had been to church. We were walking down the street, and this car pulled up. He was coming back from a steward's meeting. He asked if we wanted a ride, and I got into the front seat. So we rode around. My sister was in school over here and staying with me in an apartment on the square, on the corner where the cosmetic store is now.

On Monday night, after that Sunday, a man's hat came sailing through the transom into the apartment. And that was how he introduced himself to me. So that was the beginning of ending up in this house.

When I was teaching at New Hope, one Monday morning there was a knock on the front door of the school. There stood Ralph with this ring I have on now. He put it on me there in the door of that schoolhouse. He had bought the ring in Chattanooga. He was supposed to give it to me on Saturday, but it hadn't gotten here. So he couldn't give it to me until Monday morning. He couldn't wait; he just brought it to me down at the school and put it on my finger there.

Ralph was a Mr. Fix-It. He could do anything with electricity or machinery. His headquarters for a long time was at Harbin's Ford Company. Then when radios came, he repaired and sold them on the side from the house. He got my electric sewing machine in a trade for a radio.

This is the house we moved into. It was built in 1927. My future husband had saved money to buy an airplane; he had a pilot's license. But he decided he wanted to build a house instead. He wanted it to be our house, so we looked all over town for a lot. This lot on this corner was just grown up in bushes, but it was near the square, and in those days that was where you needed to be. Mrs. Garland, who lived across the hedge here in an old house, wanted to get a car for her son, who was drowned later. Ralph could get a car at cost, four hundred fifty dollars, and that is what this lot cost. Word Lumber Company, they weren't as big as they are now, they built this house, and it cost less than five thousand dollars.

We were waiting to set a wedding date until the house

was ready, but the old fashioned varnish took a long time to dry. So we set the date for the first Wednesday in July. But he said that was the fourth, and he was not going to lose his independence on Independence Day. So I said we could marry on the third, since we were having a simple home wedding. And we got married on the third. We were going to the Smokies. I was so anxious to see the house, and he was so anxious to bring me back to it, we spent one night in Chattanooga and came back on the fourth. We couldn't get in the house, that varnish was like molasses on the floor, so we stayed with the Wimberleys at their insistence, not at the Bailey Hotel where we had planned to stay. Ralph had already bought furniture for the house. I have lived here seventy-two years.

I used to be very busy with things around town. I was active in church, and I belonged to a lot of clubs, both social and the Fortnightly Book Club. I still go to church and am active in the Circle. I am one of the six remaining members of the book club. I am the only one left of the original group that started the library. The library started in 1929 with ninety books in an old bookcase in a jury room in the courthouse. Judge Money was up there then. The book club had an open meeting and a lot of people came and brought money or books. We needed a place to really have a library. They built the city hall down on the corner of the square. There is a lawyer's office there now, but they were not going to complete the second floor. So we went to the city fathers. I hate to say it but some of them didn't seem to know what a library was. We made one plea after another, begging for that space up there. One morning I was going down the street and Judge Snodgrass walked up to me. He was quite a character, and "I

dod" was his byword. He slapped me on the shoulder and said, "Sue Mae, I like you, but I'm tired of you women coming down here and worrying me. So if you want that place up there, you will have to finish it." And finish it, we did.

We had the first official opening of the library in 1934 upstairs in that room. The Fortnightly Book Club was responsible for getting that library. We didn't have tables, chairs, or bookcases, or anything, but those things came eventually. Word Lumber was helpful in getting the flooring in. We sold everything allowed to make money. We would entertain bridge clubs. We cooked food and sold pecans. We held social occasions. We were so proud and happy. We had volunteers running it until the city began to take it over. I take great pride now when I look at our city library.

I quit teaching for the last time after the war. My husband was in poor health, and here I was at home with two children, Ralph and Martha. I quit teaching because I needed to be at home for them, but we needed income. I was doing a lot of hoping and praying and thinking. Then one night I was looking in a magazine, and I saw an ad on how to make hats at home. So I ordered it and still have it. My grandmother, she could do anything, she used to work on our straw hats, press new flowers and put on new ribbons. So that is how I got started in the hat business. I closed in an open porch, and little by little it began to grow. I made hats, I sold hats, I made wedding veils, I sold accessories. I even made one mourning veil. I built on a back room, and that large window there was my show room. I had customers from Fort Payne and Winchester and all around, and I went to New

York to buy hats. Stina Bankston had the first hat I ever made, and she still has it. Back then, if a lady went out, she wore a hat. Of course, Easter Sunday was the day everybody looked to see what you wore. My husband died in 1961, and I finally closed the shop in 1969. Hair styles by then were beehive, and you couldn't put a hat on. Besides, I had fallen for the first time. I was able by then to get social security.

I don't attribute my long life span to anything in particular, with as many accidents and other problems I have had. When I was four months old, I fell and broke my right arm. Dr. Stanley bandaged it, but it was broken all through my elbow. It just grew back together, and I can't bend it much. It has been broken four times, but I can write and sew with it. When I was eight, I cut my little toe off cutting kindling, but it grew back. When nine, I stuck a thorn in my eye. When I was fourteen, I had a nosebleed, and I bled so much I was unconscious. For several days I was so weak I couldn't even raise my hands. It took all summer for me to get my strength back. I have also had an appendectomy and back surgery. With all this, I can only thank the good Lord. I don't know why I have lived so long.

As our conversations progressed, I developed a strong urge to visit the Princeton area with Sue Mae (I realize this may be an impolite way to refer to her, but everyone else calls her Sue Mae, too). During our second session, however, she told me how much she wanted to visit where she grew up. Her daughter, Martha, assured me that Sue Mae was able to make

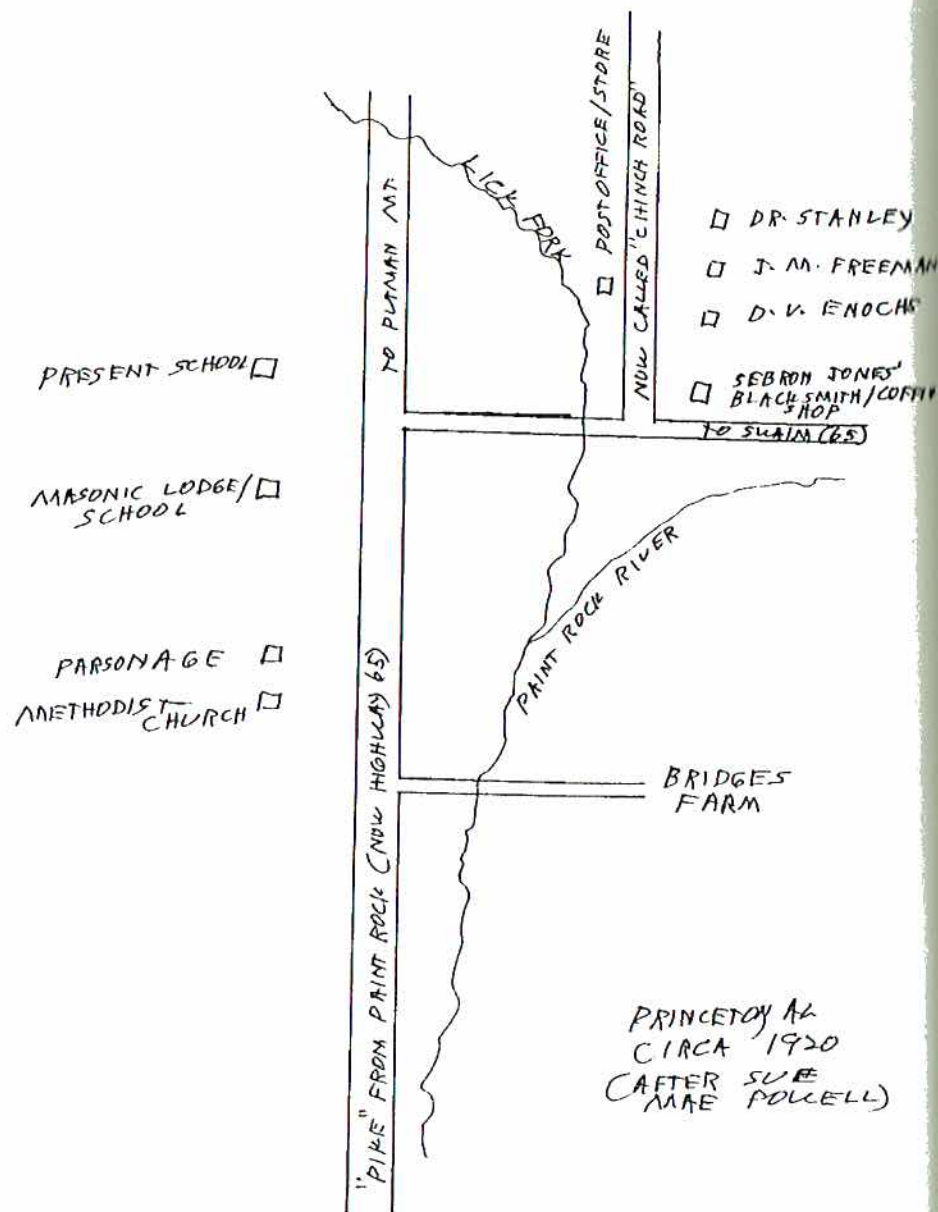
the trip. The only qualification was that she would have to change her mother's medications the morning of the trip, since public facilities were not prevalent in the Princeton area.

So one morning about nine o'clock I loaded Sue Mae in my pickup, and we headed toward Princeton, about thirty miles away. She wanted to go on the "pike," so we took highway 65 north, just east of Gurley. As we traveled up this scenic passage into the heart of Paint Rock Valley, she commented on numerous occasions about the beauty of the trees and mountains. She pointed out spots where people she had known lived, although very few of the structures remained. As we progressed further and further in the valley, she commented several times on the number of house trailers and the deterioration of the big old barns along the road.

In Holly Tree, we turned east on a side road and went several miles into Williams Cove, looking for the school in which she had taught summer sessions back in the 1920s, but there were no remnants of the school or the house of the family with which she boarded.

Just south of Princeton, we turned right off the "pike" and crossed the Paint Rock River at Bridges Crossing, the location of the log bridge that led to the Bridges farm. A bridge known locally as the "flat bridge" has replaced the log structure she remembers. Today, the river is just a small stream because of the current drought, but it didn't take much to imagine a wide river full of logs or picture the children crossing the overflowing river on the back of Emma. Just past the bridge is a narrow lane, with large fields on each side, just as in her childhood. Several hundred yards away, tucked away at the base of a hill, is the site where her grandparents, the Enochs,

A map of Princeton, Alabama circa 1920 drawn from memory by Ms. Sue Mae Freeman Powell



lived. Now there is nothing but a small house that appears to be unoccupied. Past this structure is a deeply rutted, almost impassable road going up the hill to where Sue Mae's parents lived. We went a hundred feet or so up this in my pickup, then backed down.

Before we got into downtown Princeton, we stopped at the Methodist Church, where she and her family spent so much time. The original white, inviting, modest structure still stands. Next door is the parsonage, which appears to have been redone since her youth. Also, just south of Princeton is the Masonic Hall, where the school was, but it is now a one story brick building.

In downtown Princeton (which she reminded me was not the original downtown), Sue Mae had the opportunity to meet two residents, roughly a generation younger than she is. They chatted for a long time, discussing people and families they knew way back when. Then a short distance past the Paint Rock Valley School, we stopped at the cemetery where most of her family is buried.

Our journey continued back through Princeton toward Swaim, past the bridge that crosses Lick Fork. We turned left just past the bridge, and she pointed out where "Sebes" Jones had his blacksmith shop (he also made tailor-made coffins out of fine wood). The side road we turned onto was narrow, infrequently traveled, and unpaved. This portion of the trip caused Sue Mae more dismay than any other, because her grandfather's store on the river side of the road, her childhood home across from the store, and other dwellings had been on this road, which was downtown Princeton in the early part of the century. Now, only a few rundown shacks are visible, and the road has the appellation "chinch road" for obvious reasons. Sue Mae could find no

remnants of any structures that she cherishes so much in her memory; the road even seemed to be in a different location (afterwards, she drew a map of Princeton as she remembers it from her early childhood).

After this sad interlude, we headed toward Estill Fork. On the way, we passed Bostwick Chapel, where her family and friends went in wagons during revivals. As she said, it seemed like a long trip in a wagon. We stopped briefly at Prince's store in Estill Fork and got directions to Grays Chapel, where she had also taught summer sessions. The church is still there, several miles above Prince's store, but the school part is not. As we discovered, the road dead-ends at the river, not far past Gray's Chapel.

We arrived back at Sue Mae's home almost five hours after we left. She had remained in the truck all this time, and she had been a wonderful companion the entire trip. I was

*Ms. Sue Mae Freeman
Powell about 91 years old*



becoming a little travel weary, but she seemed to be going strong. I suppose you expect such stamina in this unusual ninety-six year old lady. I was proud to have had the rare opportunity for this lovely lady to share her memories of the first part of the twentieth century with me.

Note: Sue Mae Powell died 21 January 2001. At her funeral, the following poem she had written was in the bulletin:

The Promise
Night-Day

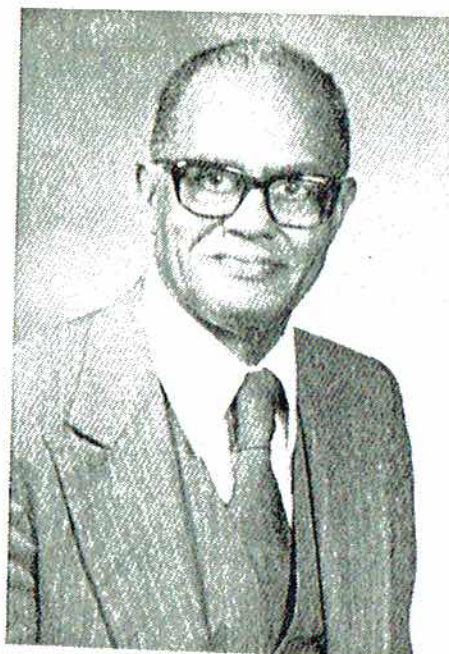
Never a day without the night,
Never a night without the day,
Ev'n before dawn's first light
Or the sun's first rays,
Darkness seems darkest and threatens to stay.
Burdens carried from the day just past,
Seem heaviest and look to last.
My heart cries in tears and prayers,
And I hear my Savior say-
"Come unto me laden with care,
My yoke is light, easy to wear."
The sun ushers in a new day,
I hear my Savior say,
"Lo, I am with you always."

—Sue Mae Powell

ARCHIE FREEMAN STEWART

For years, Archie Stewart has been one of the leaders of the black community in Scottsboro and Jackson County. He was born in a rural part of the county and has lived in the area almost all of his life.

Of course, I had heard about him over the years but had met him only briefly on one occasion; consequently, I was somewhat reluctant to approach him directly since I had no intermediary to put in a "good word" for me. When I finally did call, I got a recorded message that his phone was inoperative. So I went by his house and was told by his wife and grandson that the phone had a problem and that Archie was not home. Later, I did call



*Mr. Archie Freeman Stewart
about 1968*

and arrange to see Archie. I got there at the appointed time, and learned for the first time how much others depend on him. He had been called to go out and help someone with a problem. While I waited, several others in the community came by looking for him. Finally, Archie returned, apologizing for being late. Subsequent visits were similar. His wife Leola was always a gracious hostess until Archie got home.

Mr. and Mrs. Stewart live in the "North Houston" part of Scottsboro, which is the area where most of the relatively small black populace resides. His house is a modest wood frame, just around the corner from his daughter and her family. Pictures of Jesus and family are prominently displayed on the walls. Grandkids and neighbors seem to be fixtures as well. Mr. Stewart is a distinguished-appearing gentleman of slightly short stature with graying hair, a measured gait, a soft voice and an engaging smile. He is not an imposing figure, but after a short while his quiet leadership potential becomes evident. Archie is proud of his family, his accomplishments, and his prominence in the community and this comes across as reserved assurance, not as arrogance. He appeared eager to tell his story, and I was certainly pleased to listen.

The date is uncertain, probably just before or soon after the Civil War ended. A young man in Cherokee County, Alabama, mounted his horse and headed west toward Guntersville. His destination is uncertain. Quite likely, foremost on his mind was the memory of the last time he saw his mother—she was a slave on an auction block and was being sold to the highest bidder.

The young man rode until he arrived in Guntersville. For some reason, he did not like what he saw there, so he decided to move on. First, though, he had to cross the Tennessee River, which was not easy since there was no bridge. So, he pulled off his clothes and tied them on the back of his horse's head, caught the horse's tail, and made the horse swim across the river. He then headed north and settled in Jackson County, in the Hollywood area. The young man was Henry A. Stewart, Archie Freeman Stewart's paternal grandfather, and it was Archie's father who told his children about their grandfather's adventures as a young man.

Archie's grandfather thrived in his new home. He and his wife Mary, who "was born here in Jackson County but we know very little about her," had five children. Daniel Plasant Stewart, the oldest, was born January 19, 1887. Plasant, as he was called, married Effie McClendon, a young Hollywood native born June 4, 1888. They had ten children, and Archie, the third oldest, was born June 7, 1916 in Hollywood, Alabama, "not in downtown Hollywood but northeast of Hollywood, across from the Baptist cemetery. The road wasn't named at that time, however, it is County Road 42 now."

Archie Stewart is proud of his heritage and particularly enjoys talking about his paternal grandfather. "I didn't know him too well, because I was only about eight when he passed. I knew more from hearing talk about him. He was a big strong man. There was some question about his education. My cousin who lived close to him said the old man could not read, but I never did believe that. He came here on a horse and had nothing except what he had in his pocket. And when

he died, he had three hundred acres of land he paid for, debt free. I heard him boast about buying land on a handshake. He had quality livestock and race horses. They didn't have combines the way they do now, but he had a thresher, and it took eight mules to pull it. He was very industrious, and he went all over the county threshing wheat during the harvesting season."

Besides Plasant, Henry and Mary Stewart had four other children. The second oldest, Samuel, "lived with his dad until he passed. The third was Dora, she had one child. The fourth was Pearl Stewart, and she married a Stewart. They had one child, Elma, who had a family of ten. The fifth, the baby, was Julie. She married a Buchanan and lived in Hollywood a long time, then moved to Stevenson. None of the five went to college but all did well economically. My grandfather Stewart and most of his family settled in Martintown, which is kind of east of Hollywood."

Archie's mother was born June 4, 1888. Not much is known about her family. His maternal grandmother, Mariah McClendon, came from Maryland but "We know very little about my mother's father or where he came from. After he died, my grandmother married P. P. Tolliver. There were eleven in my mother's family. My grandmother and grandfather married when she was twelve, and she had her first child, Romedia, when she was thirteen. My uncle Robert was the oldest boy. He didn't like this area so he went to Virginia and did logging. Then he went to Chicago. He had heard that an executive at Sears and Roebuck was black, and he went to see him and wrote his mother and told her that he really was black. My uncle John McClendon was pretty aggressive and

he went to Huntsville and did quite well there. His wife taught school for about forty years." Archie remembers that his grandfather McClendon had a tanyard in Black Ankle on County Road 105, which was where most of his mother's family lived. "He would kill the cows, take their hide, tan it, and make shoes for all his children. There is a well up there now that they still call the Tanyard well."

Archie's parents had ten children born to them, nine girls and one boy (Archie). Mariah, the oldest, died when she was three years old. She was followed by Rosie Lee, Archie, Naomi, Annie, Thelma, Inez, Forrestine, and Betty. Betty's twin sister Rubilee died at childbirth. Archie also had an adopted brother, Robert, a year younger than Archie. "He was my mother's sister's child, she died when he was only three weeks old. My mother took him to raise, and he was the only brother I knew."

Archie was born in "an old two-room house owned by Frank Johnson, a white man who had quite a bit of land there. The house was almost across from the 'section yard'. At that time, people who worked on the railroad lived in houses owned by the railroad and these were called 'section houses', and of course our community was called the 'section yard'. We just lived a short distance from the yard and across from the Baptist cemetery. I guess the cemetery was a 'duplex', blacks were buried on one side and whites on the other, just like today. My grandfather Stewart gave the land for the black cemetery, and he also gave the land for the little black church up on County Road 36.

"When I was three, we moved to Black Ankle. My dad

and grandfather Stewart owned sixty acres there together. We moved into a one-room house on what is County Road 105 now. My father and grandfather owned the house, and my dad built a room onto the house. We lived there until 1928. Then the house burned to the ground and we lost everything we had. Afterwards, we moved into a house about a quarter of a mile away. This house was owned by my uncle. It was not completed, and he started to repair it but didn't. By that time I had a bunch of sisters, and we stayed there for six years in two rooms. They were large rooms, so we had three big beds in one room, and we fit into one room pretty easy. It was nothing for two or three to sleep in one bed. This was kind of common and we didn't think much about it. When we first moved there, we didn't have a privy, so we had to go into the woods. Later, we did have a privy outside. There was a wood stove in the kitchen."

Archie's father was a farmer, and "That was about all he had ever done except for construction labor after what they called 'laying by' time. When they were not busy working on the farm, farmers would do labor work around Hollywood or Scottsboro. He raised cotton, corn, and soybeans, these were his main crops. He also raised some peas and beans, and during the spring and summer we got them fresh out of the garden and in the winter we ate them dried. The corn was taken to the grist mill in downtown Hollywood. It was owned by my step-grandfather P. P. Tolliver. He also owned a cotton gin, grocery store a sorghum mill there, too. He was an aggressive man.

"My dad had a wagon and two brown mules. Later on, we had four mules after I got old enough to plow. I started

plowing when I was nine years old. I had one mule then, and when I was ten there was another, so I had two mules. Sometimes I wished I had more brothers to help with the plowing. But it was part of life, so I just did it." Actually, Archie helped on the farm "from the time I can remember," well before he began plowing. "When we got home from school, we had to get out of the school clothes, because we had chores to do. We had livestock to feed and water, hogs to feed, cows to milk. During the winter, there was wood to cut. My sisters worked on the farm, too."

Mr. Stewart remembers his dad as a "mild easygoing man, and he didn't do any violence. He loved all his children, not just one of them. He would discipline, but it was not the type of discipline most people would do, beating and all. He didn't do that. He would talk to us. My father was one of the oldest deacons in our church when he died." Archie's mother was also "easygoing and a very religious woman who always wanted to do what was right. She wanted to hold the family together. She loved to sew, and had a Singer sewing machine, and made all our clothes. In fact, she loved to work." Unfortunately, she died when Archie was thirteen, two weeks after delivering his baby sister Betty. "After my mother passed, my oldest sister, Rosie Lee, who was sixteen, had to take over her job running the house. My job was to work with my dad on the farm. He didn't choose to marry again, so we had to raise all the children."

Archie doesn't think his growing up years were very different from those of others who lived in the Black Ankle area, black or white, and he enjoys reminiscing about that period in his life. "For entertainment, we used to play quite a

few games indoors. My daddy belonged to a band, and we sang a lot as a group. He taught us to sing. My mother sang, too, and she had an organ, but none of my sisters learned how to play it. We didn't get a radio until 1928. We used to listen to country music, there wasn't much else. We did listen to some religious programs, like a black preacher from Chicago. Late on Sunday afternoons, all the black boys and girls would gather in Hollywood, and we would watch both Southern Railroad trains pass by. This was after we finished church.

"We didn't have any real close neighbors in Black Ankle. The nearest was about a quarter of a mile away, and that was my uncle and his family. He was married to my mother's sister. Black Ankle was mostly a black community, and nobody, black or white, had much money. I don't know how it got its name. There weren't any little stores out where we were. There was one about a mile and a half away on Tupelo Pike. We used to ride a horse over there. Most of our trading was done in Hollywood or Scottsboro. We used to order from Sears Roebuck and Walter Fields catalogs. My first suit came from the Walter Fields catalog. Since my daddy had to buy our shoes, I didn't wear shoes much. We got two pair a year, one for summer and one for winter. It was a stretch for my dad, but somehow, somehow, he made it."

Church played an important role in the Stewarts' family life. "We always looked forward to going to church on the weekends. We didn't have theaters or anything to go to. We went to the St. James Missionary Baptist Church for Sunday School every Sunday. Henry Campbell, the preacher there, had church only one Sunday a month. My daddy belonged to a church in New Hope, which was near Martintown, and

they had a preaching every first Sunday, and we would go there. We also went some to Mt. Zion Church in Hollywood. The preacher at New Hope was on a circuit, and at Mt. Zion the same thing. The same preacher did those two plus Friendship Fackler and one in Stevenson. Henry Campbell, at St. James, had only that one church, and he preached only once a month. Churches now consider time. Then, we went to church all day, or most of the day. Sunday School, then Church, then eat. There was no where else to go except to watch the trains in Hollywood.”

Archie was “about six or seven” when he started to school. “The first school I went to was located on county road 105 in Black Ankle, about a half mile from the house. It was in the St. James Baptist Church. We would go there in the summertime for about a month or six weeks, then we would go to a school in Hollywood. We had to walk to get to the school in Hollywood. It seemed like five miles, but it was only about three. If it was raining bad we didn’t go, we had no way to get there. The thing about it is that when we started we did not know our alphabet. So we spent the first two months in what we called the ABCs. The next year we had a primer, and we spent a year on it. And then we had the first grade. Once I spoke at Rainsville and was asked why I was so interested in Head Start, and I said it took me three years to get out of the first grade, and I didn’t want that to happen to anybody else.

“There was just one room in the church in Black Ankle for school. The girls had a privy but the boys had to go to the woods. We just had one teacher. We continued to go to Black Ankle in the summer and Hollywood in the winter into about

the sixth grade, but both together did not make up a whole year. If it was raining bad we might be late or we didn’t go, we didn’t have any way to get there. When I first went to Hollywood, it was in a separate building, and I remember that I thought it was big and high, but there was only one teacher. Then the number of students increased, and the PTA demanded another teacher, and they finally had two teachers when I was in the fifth and sixth grades. Then when I was in the seventh grade, in 1933, I believe, school opened the first of November, the weather was pretty that year, and daddy said we had to gather the cotton, and go to school after we got the cotton out. And of course we got the cotton out, and we got ready to go to school, but it lasted only one month. There was no money because of the depression, so we didn’t have any more school that year.”

Mr. Stewart recalls that back then boys would go to school until it was time to work and the girls went until they got married or got a job. “They got married pretty young.” His parents were different from most in that they encouraged Archie and his siblings to go to school. They “didn’t talk much about how much education they had, but from my understanding, they had about an eighth grade education. My mother was pretty good, she would hold a kerosene lamp and show me how to do fractions. My daddy taught us at home, too. But they didn’t have to make us study at home, we all wanted to learn. I don’t know that this was typical of other families, but the Johnson family was smart and competed with the Stewart family in school. Their parents must have pushed them.” Of course, the schools in Black Ankle and Hollywood were all black. “Equal opportunity in schools

was not an issue or concern back then. I would think that blacks and whites got along together, but we didn't have a lot of contact. At harvesting time, we would pick cotton together, no big thing about that, but we didn't go to school together."

As things turned out, the one month in the seventh grade at Hollywood was the last time Archie would attend school in Jackson County. "The next year, a black fellow named Walter Gravett, who was the extension agent for blacks in Jackson and Madison counties, came up and he was trying to get students to go to A&M. He asked my daddy about my going. Daddy said if I wanted to go, all right. I was about sixteen at that time, and I wanted to go, but I didn't want to leave my dad at the farm. Finally, I decided to go. I was in the seventh grade and went there as a work student. Most of the students there at that time were in high school. I worked all day, mostly in the kitchen, and then went to school two nights a week while I was in the seventh grade. In the eighth and ninth grades I went to school all day but worked some at night. We took mostly math and English in school there."

Mr. Stewart's education was interrupted the following year. "When I was in the tenth grade, I had to come home because my dad had a stroke and sat in a chair for two years, and I had to take up the family. I only went one semester that year. And in the eleventh grade, I still had to gather crops, I didn't go but one semester. So the only high school work I had was one semester in the tenth grade and one in the eleventh. I never had the twelfth grade. I was in charge of the family. I did the best I could with them. Of course, I don't want to leave my adopted brother Rob out. He was at home during

the time I was there to manage the farm. He helped, but he got married so his time was kind of divided. But the whole family worked together, and we didn't have a lot of feuding because we loved each other." Archie would not return for further education until 1946.

After dropping out of A&M, he worked on the farm and cleared land for TVA for several years. "When the clearing was done, I was out of a job. So two others and I hitched a ride to Anniston, and we got there about midnight on a Sunday. We spent the rest of the night in the bus station. Next morning, there were taxis hauling workers out to Fort McClellan. So we got a taxi, it cost fifteen cents. And they hired us to do construction work. We worked there for about three months, then we got laid off temporarily. While we were laid off, I got a job in a cafeteria. I didn't make any money there but I got food and I wasn't running up any big bills. I worked there until I got drafted into the army September 10, 1942.

"I was about twenty six when I was drafted, and I didn't really want to be drafted. I knew a retired army man who had written the recruitment people asking that I be deferred, and I had been deferred three times. When I finally went in, they sent me to Fort Benning. After seven months, they sent me to Hawaii, at Pearl Harbor. Then they sent me to Okinawa, and I was in the last battle there. I didn't have a furlough for three years. Evidently they checked my record and found out I knew something about cooking, so they put me in the mess hall. I wound up as a mess sergeant, responsible for feeding the two hundred fifty men in my company three times a day. I did that until I was discharged January

10, 1946." He was in combat forty seven days and received the Army Good Conduct Medal in 1946. While Archie was gone, his adopted brother Robert, along with his father, kept the family and the farm going.

After he was discharged from the army, he stayed with his sister in Chattanooga for a short while. "I had saved up some money and always wanted to go to college. When I got back, my daddy had spent the money I thought I was saving, but I didn't get too mad because he was trying to keep the family together. And he did. So I decided to work some before I went to college, and I did in Anniston until the fall of 1946. In order to qualify to go to college, I had to go to Montgomery to take the GED. I passed it despite my education background, and I entered A&M in the fall of 1946 as a freshman in college." Archie was thirty years old when he started college.

He graduated after four years at A&M. He must have his mark there early on, for he was voted class president the first year and remained in that capacity for all four years. "At that time at A&M, most boys, including me, took agriculture and most girls took home economics, since it was an agricultural college. I was under the GI bill, so I could go full time. I still worked some, mostly in the kitchen, to help my sisters. I worked there off and on, directly under Doctor Drake, the president of the college. I went on a dietician's pay rate. I lived in a dorm, and graduated in 1950."

Archie's education is closely intertwined with that of his sisters, and he is extremely proud of their educational accomplishments, and rightly so. "There was no high school for blacks in Jackson County. We had an uncle in Holly-

wood who had people in Chattanooga, so Rosie Lee, Naomi and Annie stayed with them and finished at Howard High School up there. "Rosie did not get any further training. Naomi was about to finish up at A&M when she got sick and died. Annie did nursing training and worked at Erlanger as a nurse for thirty years. When Thelma, the next one, finished junior high school, Carver High School in Scottsboro opened, so she rode a bus down from Hollywood. It was not a bus but a cattle truck. It was run by Mr. West, he had a big canvas over it for rain. There were a dozen or more kids from Hollywood and Fackler riding that cattle truck. That lasted about two or three years before they got a bus. Carver opened about 1944 and went from grades one through twelve. There were feeder schools from Stevenson, Cedar Grove, Fackler, Hollywood, Paint Rock and Woodville. There weren't any in Larkinsville.

"After Thelma finished high school, she was determined to go to college. Of course, she didn't have any money but father agreed to let her go if she wanted to. She went to A&M as a work student and worked at the poultry yard through school. She studied home economics but got a job as a regular teacher in Stevenson. She went to graduate school and was the first black woman from Jackson County to receive a masters degree, she got it from A&M. She spent eight years as a principal in Bridgeport. She also taught at Drake in Stevenson when it opened in 1962. In 1968, when full integration came, Thelma was sent to Stevenson High School to teach reading, which she had special training in. She taught there until she retired.

"Inez was the next one. She also went to the high school

in Scottsboro, but she didn't finish there because the old school burned and they had school in churches in Scottsboro. Then she went to A&M and worked her way through. I helped her any way I could. After three years of college she was offered a job teaching at Fackler. At that time, you could be certified to teach in the classroom like that. She taught there and went to school in the summer and received her degree three years later. When they closed the Fackler school, she went to Drake and taught there until 1956 when she got married and moved to Huntsville.

"The next was Forrestine who went to Hollywood Junior High School and then to Carver. After she finished Carver, several of us, Thelma and Inez and I, were at A&M, so we felt like my dad couldn't let all of us go. So she went over to Langston and taught for one year after finishing high school. Then she went to Anniston to take beauty culture for a year. After graduating from beauty college, she found out it was not her thing, so she went to A&M to get her degree in elementary education. She taught in Randolph County for thirty years until she retired. The next was Betty, the baby. She finished Carver and A&M and taught in an elementary school in Anniston until she retired after thirty years."

So five of the Stewart siblings finished high school, graduated from college at A&M, and subsequently taught school. One died just before finishing at A&M and another one became a nurse. This family's educational accomplishments are remarkable for a poor family from rural Jackson County at that time, black or white. Archie attributes this accomplishment to two main factors-his dad's permissiveness and the close family unity. "My dad could not afford to send us to

college, but what we liked about it was that he permitted us to go. That was not the case with most families in Hollywood. Also, the family stuck together and helped each other. After Thelma finished college, she took Forrestine as her dependent, she supplied her with school supplies and money. Inez took Betty, and I helped both because I had a little bit of money."

A significant change occurred in Archie's life while at A&M. He had been acquainted with Leola Walker from Scottsboro because "She and her sister sang in churches and her father was a preacher and I knew the family through the church connection." Leola went on to A&M, and their acquaintanceship became something more serious-they got married June 7, 1949. After he graduated in 1950 with a degree in agriculture, Archie applied to several different systems to teach and received an offer from Talladega. However, his oldest daughter had just been born, and Mrs. Stewart didn't want him to leave. She had been teaching in Hollywood, and since she was taking time off to take care of the baby, her job became vacant. "I took that spot for one semester to be with my wife and new daughter. She had the fifth and sixth grades, and I taught that for half a year. I guess I made an impression on the superintendent because he recommended that I go to Stevenson and be principal after only six months teaching. It had first through ninth grades. I was the principal but had to teach seventh through the ninth grades. I also organized a basketball team and coached it. It was a Rosenwald school."

(Note-An article in the Huntsville Times discussed the

Rosenwald schools. Julius Rosenwald was a German-Jewish immigrant who became president of Sears Roebuck. After a visit to Tuskegee Institute, where he was stimulated by Booker T. Washington's efforts to provide blacks an education, Rosenwald put up matching funds for counties to build grade schools for blacks in the rural south. Between 1913 and his death in 1932, he donated four million dollars of his money plus twenty million dollars in Sears stock to the program. His contributions, along with matching community funds and government money, helped establish more than 5,300 schools, teacher homes and training centers).

Archie taught there until 1959. "In 1960, they built Drake School. They made me principal there and I served there until integration came in 1968. In 1965, though, we had freedom of choice. If whites wanted to go to black schools, they could. That went fairly smoothly in Jackson County compared to others. However, there were quite a few whites who lived up the road from the school, and fourteen enrolled in Drake. It was reported that I had more white students enrolled there than any other black school in Alabama. They all played together after school hours. Drake was a junior high school, and after there the students came to Carver. After integration, they all went over to Stevenson High School. Drake remained as an elementary and that is where my daughter teaches. My name is on the stone at the school. While I was at Stevenson, I went for five summers to Tuskegee Institute and got a masters in school administration."

In 1965, while teaching at Drake, Mr. Stewart became involved in one of his extracurricular projects. He and Reverend Willie Mays were instrumental in organizing the

county-wide Voters League. Archie was vice-president the first year, then served as president the next twenty-two years. He is particularly proud of one of the accomplishments of the League during his presidency. "When integration came in 1968, Carver High School was closed and the black students went to Scottsboro High School. The city did not have transportation then, so the Voters League bought an old bus from a church in Bridgeport and had it for two years. It gave us so much trouble. I was in the bank one day talking to Mr. Jacobs the banker, and he asked how we were doing with the bus. I said I would like to buy a new one but we didn't have any money, so he said he'd let us have it. So we got a brand new bus and ran it for five years. We charged ten cents there and ten cents back. The last year we went up to a quarter. But we were able to do that without borrowing any more money."

Integration changed Archie's job situation as well. "When integration came, I thought I would remain as principal, but it didn't work out that way. The county school board assigned me as a counselor at Stevenson High School, Stevenson Elementary, and Hollywood Junior High. I had no training in that area so I was forced to go back and get a masters in guidance and counseling from A&M. I went in the summers. Going back again was pretty hard but I made it through, so I have two masters degrees. Then in 1971 they made me testing supervisor for the county, and I was responsible for all the testing in the Jackson County schools until 1981."

After thirty-four years, Archie Stewart retired from teaching in June of 1981. On May 23, 1981, just prior to his retirement, a testimonial banquet in his honor was held at

Goose Pond Colony. The banquet was sponsored by the Jackson County Teachers Association, the Jackson County Democratic Conference, the Jackson County Voter's League and the Jackson County Chapter of the NAACP. Over one thousand people attended. Those paying tribute included the Honorable Yvonne Kennedy, the Chairman of the Black Legislative Caucus, from Mobile; Fred Gray, Attorney, from Tuskegee; Dr. Earl Holloway, Jackson County Superintendent of Education; and Roy Owens, Mayor of Scottsboro. The keynote address was by Dr. Joe L. Reed, chairman of the Alabama Democratic Conference.

During the banquet, Mr. Stewart's accomplishments were acknowledged. A partial list includes attending six different colleges and universities, president of Jackson County and Scottsboro City Teachers Associations (black), president of the Jackson County Voter's League, president of the Jackson County Education Association, member of the Board of Directors of the Alabama Education Association, chairman of the 5th District of the Alabama Democratic Conference, and an invitation by President Carter in 1979 to confer on the SALT agreement.

Mr. Stewart modestly states that this banquet was "the highest moment in my life."

Since he retired, Archie has remained active. For the first two years, he bought old houses and remodeled them. Then in 1983, "The person in charge of the EOC in Huntsville called and offered me a job with him. I had an office in the courthouse there for six years recruiting students and helping with student loans, grants and whatnot. I retired from

that in 1988 and have been jobbing around since then." He has rental houses and some other property which require his attention. Archie and Leola attend St. Elizabeth Missionary Baptist Church, just down the street from his house, where he remains quite active (member of the deacon board, superintendent of Sunday School, church financial secretary for thirty-one years). He keeps in close touch with his surviving siblings—Rosie and Annie in Chattanooga, Inez in Huntsville, Forrestine in Woodland, and Betty in Anniston. Thelma died in 1995 and his adopted brother Robert died two years ago. He continues to be interested in the NAACP (Leola served as president for ten years). Perhaps most of all, though, he enjoys spending time with his two children (Besfanette, a teacher in California, and Tiajuana, who teaches in Stevenson) and his seven grandchildren. For Archie Stewart, retirement has not been a time for idleness.

Archie and I had several sessions over several months. Not long after our first interview, he had colon surgery and was unable to continue with me for some time. Despite the delays, he was always open, friendly and cooperative. I was impressed with his devotion to his family and his willingness to help his friends, neighbors, and fellow blacks. As we continued with the interviews, I became more and more aware of his stature in the community with whites as well as blacks.

Late one afternoon in April we had the opportunity to retrace his roots in Jackson County. After a short distance on Tupelo Pike we turned right on County Road 105. After a mile or so, he pointed out a small pond on the right side of

the road where the church and Black Ankle school had been. Just beyond the pond, we turned right on County Road 556, which dead-ended in less than a half mile. This, Archie said, is where he lived in Black Ankle. The setting is striking—relatively flat fields surrounded by high hills in the near distance. (Archie was still uncertain about the origin of the name Black Ankle, but I was told by another longtime resident of the county that the name came about because the rich black soil was so deep it would come up to your ankle).

We returned to Route 105 and continued east for a short distance until we arrived at County Road 555, also a short dead-end stretch, and Archie indicated that this land was in his mother's family for one hundred years. In fact, Archie remembers that the entire Black Ankle community was composed mostly of blacks when he was growing up, but mostly whites live there now.

Again, we returned to Route 105, turned right on County Road 33, then left on County Road 42 and on into Hollywood. Near the railroad tracks Archie pointed out where the section yard had been located, and he also pointed out the field where he lived the first three years of his life. Just beyond that was the Mud Creek Primitive Baptist Church with its separate black and white cemeteries (his grandfather donated the land for the black portion). We then took County Road 36 through Martintown to U.S. 72 and then back to Scottsboro.

I'm not sure who enjoyed the trip the most, Archie or me. I was pleased to have the opportunity to familiarize myself with the places we had talked about, and he obviously feels extremely close kinship with his roots and the land and places

we visited. Archie told that he "loves Jackson County" and Jackson County, in return, has certainly benefitted from having him as native and as a devoted citizen.



*Archie and Leola
Stewart on their
fiftieth wedding
anniversary*

LILLIE MAE DAVIS CULBERT

I almost did not have an opportunity to talk with Ms. Culbert. I wanted someone from Langston, and several people had told me of a bright elderly lady who would be perfect. The only problem was that this lady demurred, saying that she "didn't have anything worthwhile to tell me." She did, however, refer me to Ms. Culbert, who turned out to be extraordinarily knowledgeable about the Langston area.

My first visit with Ms. Culbert was about eight o'clock on a Monday morning. I had never met her and had only talked



*Ms. Lillie Mae Davis
Culbert in 2000*

with her on the phone to set up an appointment. She lives in a neat brick house approximately halfway between the center of Langston and the South Sauty Bridge, in southeast Jackson County just above the Marshall County line. She is a small, vibrant lady with alert eyes. I discovered right away that she is not reluctant to talk about any subject, particularly the history of Langston.

I had barely sat down when she went to a desk and pulled out a stack of thick ledger books which were filled with information about her "family lines" and local history. In a clearly legible handwriting, she had meticulously compiled all this information over many years. In addition, she has many old photographs of Langston and its citizens. She is proud that people interested in genealogy and local history come from "Texas and everywhere" to pore over her trove of information, and during our conversations she often referred to her ledgers.

Lillie Mae Davis Culbert was born October 7, 1916, in her parent's home just south of Langston, Alabama, in eastern Jackson County, near the south bank of the Tennessee River. She was delivered by Dr. Mason, a physician in Langston who later moved to Birmingham. Her family's house was located just a quarter of a mile north of her current home.

Her father was Tillman P. Davis, and her mother was Lema Jones Davis. He was an "old bachelor" forty-five years old when they got married, and she was a widow with two children (Inez and Paul). Her first husband was William Davis, Tillman's cousin, but he died three weeks after Paul was born

in 1909. She married Tillman in January of 1916, and Lillie Mae was born in October of that year. Robert, Lillie Mae's full brother, was born 30 July 1921.

The Davis family has been in the Langston area for many years. Her great-grandfather, Wilson Davis, was the first person buried in the Langston Cemetery. He was from Sparta, Tennessee, and is known to have been in Limestone County, Alabama, in 1819. Shortly afterwards, he moved to Coffeetown (the forerunner of Langston), which was later covered by the backwaters of Lake Guntersville. Her grandfather, Tillman Senior, was one of five siblings. The oldest was Thomas Jefferson, who went to Texas as a young man. Farley, the next, was a teacher in Asbury, near Albertville. Bill, the third, also went to Texas. Tillman was the fourth, followed by Mary, who married Chris Griggs.

Lillie Mae remembers that "Thomas Jefferson Davis and others moved to Texas because daddy had an uncle who moved there after the Civil War. And a sister followed. They always heard how much money they could make and how cheap land was out there." Charley Vaughn, her grandmother's father on her father's side, had also settled in Texas. "They came from Virginia and settled in Edgar Springs for awhile, then they went by wagon to Bastrop, Texas. As they passed over about Aspel, Grandmother Vaughn took sick and died, but they buried her and went on. My daddy lived nine years in Bastrop with Martha Vaughn, an old maid aunt. He came back to his daddy's funeral, and that is when he and momma met and married." One of Lillie Mae's favorite memories is a visit to Bastrop. "I visited the cemetery by the Colorado River. And I saw the tombs and the seventeen hundred acres the

Vaughns owned. And the dirt was black and didn't need fertilizer, but the big oak trees were dead, they had had a terrible drought."

Lillie Mae's mother, Lema, was born in Tenbroek, which is near Fyffe on Sand Mountain. Lema's father was George W. Jones from Dekalb County, and Lema was one of seven children. "Momma was the oldest, and there is a street over here named for her. Her brother Henry settled in Scottsboro and was sheriff in Jackson County for two terms. Charley worked with Woodward Ironworks in Birmingham. Mamie was a housewife and lived in Brownsville, Texas. Claude owned a store in Langston. Hassie taught school, and Joe died at thirty one with TB." Her grandfather George was a carpenter by trade and built numerous houses in the Langston area. He and J. J. Campbell (Bud's dad), would cross the river on Sundays, catch the train in Scottsboro, and ride to Huntsville, where they "helped build all those big buildings and the little houses for the Merrimac, Lincoln and Dallas cotton mills."

Ms. Culbert and her ledgers are a valuable source of information about the community that is now Langston. "In 1836, four Coffee brothers (Brent, Hugh, John, Gig) settled on the south side of the Tennessee River in Jackson County. The settlement was called Coffeetown after the brothers. Another Coffee (Langston), who was born in 1811 and was a nephew of the four brothers, had also moved to Langston in the eighteen thirties. Langston Coffee established the first post office in Coffeetown on December 11, 1835, and was the postmaster until 1846, when he was replaced by Enoch Floyd.

“The four Coffee brothers moved to Texas before the Civil War. After they moved, Coffeetown died. Then, in 1869, Mr. James Morgan sold sixteen lots where Langston is now and that is how it came into existence. The name was secured from Langston Coffee. The community began to grow and thrive and became a big town. My mother told me that in 1894 there were nine stores in Langston, operated by Coleman Brown, Conrad Atkins, Reuben Morgan, Silas Smith, John Myers, John Welborn and Barton Shook. The other two stores were Moore and May, and Webb and Morgan. There were also four physicians in town at that time—Dr. Charley Wesley Adkins, who moved to Albertville, Dr. Olan May, who moved to Texas, Dr. Jeff Haralson who moved to Fort Payne and was Judge Haralson’s ancestor, and Dr. David Kirby.”

Lillie Mae was born into a family of farmers, and she was raised as a “farm girl.” “I have been told my granddaddy Davis had about seven hundred acres. He herded his cattle and hogs to Davis Landing, which was below Langston, and loaded them on a boat. But that was before they turned the water out, so you don’t hear that name anymore. When his wife died, he married a real young woman, she was younger than his youngest child. After his estate was divided, my dad got about three hundred acres, and it was part of the family farm. He grew cotton and corn, and he had pasture for cattle. He had some tenant farmers. One was a colored man, Jess Evans. And then there were two white men, James King and Alex Treece. The tenants lived in tenant houses.”

She remembers very well working on the farm and around

the house when growing up. “After I was big enough, I helped pick cotton. We’d take in the stove wood, we called it that because it was put in our wood stove to cook with. We would also have to bring in what we called firewood. But the chore I dreaded most was bringing water from the well. There was a reservoir by the stove, and it held a lot of water that was mostly used for bathing, which we did in a galvanized tub.

“We ate mostly food that came from the farm. We ate three meals a day, called breakfast, dinner and supper. Daddy had his hogs butchered, plenty of them. Of course, we didn’t have electricity, so we had a smokehouse, which meant we had plenty of ham to eat. And without electricity, we used kerosene lamps for light at night. They were on tables and mantles, and there were several in the kitchen. Our privy was outside.”

Ms. Culbert has fond memories of her parents. “My father was a short, fat, brown-eyed man. He was bald when I knew him, but I was told he was gray-headed by the time he was twenty one. He loved fun, ice cream suppers, things like that. My momma was a little woman, she loved to sew, and later on she fished all over the lake but she wouldn’t eat the fish. She was a sport. Both of them liked to mix with other people and to garden.” She also recalls that “They were good and loving but pretty strict on us. We knew what my daddy said one time, that would be all. Still, we played a lot and had fun. We played games such as hide-and-seek, jump the rope, and other childhood games. We also had a battery radio. I remember the battery business, it would eat places on the rug or wood. Daddy had to listen to a certain announcer tell the weather and news. He had to hear that, that came first.

But we would try to save the battery until Saturday night for the music. It wasn't the Grand Ole Opry back then, but I think it came out of Kentucky somewhere, maybe from the Renfro Valley. Later, when Robert was in the war, daddy would gather us around that battery radio so we could listen to Gabriel Heatter tell the war news."

Her parents only had a limited education, which was the norm in the early part of the twentieth century in rural areas. "Daddy was not an educated man, and neither was my mother. They could read and write what they had to, of course, but they didn't go far in school like his brother Farley did. Farley went to Albertville, they had some kind of institution, and when you got through there you had Greek and all kinds of math. He made a teacher." They knew the value of a good education, however, and "My daddy did push us to see that we went to school." Her father was interested in the news and current events, and subscribed to the Scottsboro paper ("I don't know what the name would have been back then") and a Birmingham paper ("I believe it was the Age-Herald").

Lillie Mae looks back on her years growing up in the Langston area as a special time. Back then, the population was sufficient to support a relatively large school, two active churches and at least four stores in the "downtown" district. She remembers that they ordered "Christmas things" from Sears, and sometimes they would have to go to Scottsboro to pay taxes, to bank, or to buy medicines. To get to Scottsboro, "You had to cross on the ferry, which was located up above Langston. I can show you the trail that went there, it was called Larkins Landing. The ferry landed on the other side

near where Goose Pond is now. It was called Larkins Landing on the other side, too. I can remember when in the summer during dry spells you could almost drive a car across the river. It would freeze over in the winter sometimes."

Most of the necessities, however, were available in Langston, and she has a vivid recollection of all the buildings that were present from about 1924 to 1934 (see chart). "Going north from our house below Langston, on your left you passed the school and the Methodist Church. Just past the church, when I was a little girl there was a little biddy building owned by my granddaddy G. W. Jones, who run a grist mill. Right near it, everybody remembers the blacksmith shop. Then there was Mr. Charley Stanfield's big store, where you got general merchandise, material, yard goods, and dishes. He let you trade on credit, and you could pay up when you sold your cotton in the fall. Then there was Jess Gilbreath's meat market, they just sold on Saturday. They would kill the cows on Fridays and wrap it with sheets and everybody would come for a little piece of beefsteak.

"Then Mr. Curtis Raynes, on down, he had dolls and all kinds of toys. Just past Mr. Raynes's store was the post office, then there was a store run by my uncle Claude Jones until he went to Texas. Upstairs in his store was the Masonic Lodge, founded by Wallace Haralson. I can remember the Lodge well because my daddy was a Mason, and they would have oyster stew once in a while. That was the only chance we ever had to go there, they told us a goat lived up there. Right on up there, I remember two families that run the switchboard. One family moved to Scottsboro, and then the Collins had it. I used to run around with their daughter, we would love

to eavesdrop on the phone conversations.

“On the other side of the road, just past the road to Sand Mountain, was the Benson house, then the Benson store. I can remember Mr. Benson because he was superintendent of our Sunday School class, and he pulled the church bell, you could hear it all over Langston early on Sunday morning. Right by it was a little shop that had been a car garage, but it had been moved to there. Pap Johnson, an old bachelor colored guy, I believe his full name was Joe Wheeler Johnson, he run a shoe shop. He repaired shoes and sold shoes. He mostly done his business on Sunday morning. And then there was the Frank Fennell store, where you could buy plow tools. The next building was a post office at one time, but I remember that Charley Collins had a barber shop there. They would go mostly on Saturdays to get their hair cut.”

Langston may have been a rural community, but opportunities for entertainment were available for her, her family, and her friends. Saturday afternoons were often spent in the “shopping area” of Langston. “We’d go into town. I’d have maybe a nickel or dime, and I didn’t know whether I would spend it for ice cream or crackerjacks. Momma and daddy would go into the stores. There were chairs in the stores, and they would sit and visit for a while, and they would buy what they needed.” Her father bought a “T Model” in 1924, and they would ride in it for the short distance into town. Before that, they would take the wagon or buggy (which was used mostly for visiting and “for Sunday”).

“Edgar Springs was in Gilbreath Cove, and it was a good place to have a picnic. It was south of Langston and is covered by water now. There was Allen Pond. And Davis Spring,

which was at the foot of Sand Mountain up past the gin, was where boys and girls would go and just hang around. It was named for our family, and a Davis family lived up there.”

But perhaps the most memorable event in her early years was when the circus came to Langston, and she remembers every moment of the show and the events surrounding it. “Bonnie Richey and I may be the only ones in Langston that remember the Mighty Haig Show. The circus came to Langston from Scottsboro on a Sunday, and they came by ferry. All but the elephants, which waded across. It was in October when the farmers had gathered their crops and had a little money. Daddy drove us to Larkins Landing to see them cross. They had the lions and other animals in wagons with big tires. It was a steep bank at the landing, and I remember them getting the elephants, or one anyway, to help pull the wagons up the bank. And when they got everything across, I saw they had a lot of pretty horses.

“Two weeks before they came, two or three men came over and bought hay for the animals, and they bought two or three head of beef for their hands and the animals to eat. They rented a spot from Mr. Frank Raynes, right near the post office.

“We watched them set up. They took an elephant and put up a small tent first, then the elephant helped put a big tent. While they were doing this, they gathered the animals and went to the foot of the mountain to Davis Springs to water them and to bring water back. I remember they all went in a row over that way.

“They had the show the next night. And I was there, and it was the first time I had ever seen Chinese or Japanese. And

this girl was on the trapeze with her husband, and that was something. They had a small band, and when it was time for the girl to come out on the tightrope, they played on the drum so everybody would get nervous. Oh, that was something to see! Langston had to have a lot of people then because they wouldn't have stopped at a little place. The circus moved on down the road to Kirbytown where they set up again."

Lillie Mae and her family continued to live in the house where she was born until she was sixteen years old. She has a picture of the house, a white two story structure with a large porch and "green" shutters. It was sitting in a beautiful location near a field with a view of the hills. It was shaded by a large tree. Unfortunately, the house burned, and her father "built a little bungalow nearby where my brother's house is. It was built just like the one I live in now."

The school Ms. Culbert attended was less than half a mile from her house, on the road to Langston. An older school had burned before she started to school (it was a two-story structure, and the Masons used the upstairs before they moved to the building in Langston). The school she remembers had four large rooms and a big auditorium. Next door was a "teacherage," where the principal lived. "It was a big school, with maybe fifty students in some of the earlier grades. The rooms were full, there were so many students. The first and second grades were in one room. The teacher would have the first grade. Then she would let them be doing some writing or seat work while she took up the second grade. Later on, there were maybe three grades in each room, since there were

fewer pupils as we got older. We had four teachers, but one year I remember we had five. One taught piano, and she used the auditorium."

The school in Langston generally went for nine months a year, from eight AM until three PM. Sometimes, though, "They would turn out the school the first of October for cotton picking so children could help gather crops. We started sometime in July to make up for this. The school didn't even close down during the depression. We had heat, and we carried our lunch. We didn't require so much. We knew it was bad, but all of us were in it together. The school just kept going.

"The school was heated with wood during my first years. My daddy owned some bottoms land, and he and a lot of fathers would cut wood and donate it the school. Later, they had coal. Each room had a stove. At first, it was one that had the door open, but later they got the potbellied stove that coal was put in.

"We carried our lunch to school. We took biscuits with sausage or ham, jelly, fried pies, and tea cakes. We'd swap our sausage and biscuit with somebody who had cheese and crackers from the store. We had the best and didn't know it."

She remembers that Mr. Armstrong, the Presbyterian preacher, was the principal part of the time, and she had him for the seventh through the tenth grades. Gordon Foster taught math, and "We would go into another room for algebra and geometry under him." Mr. Armstrong had them play soccer when he came. Langston also had a basketball team. "I can remember that Paul played basketball, he excelled in all sports. They had an open court in Langston, and they

played teams from Section and Marshall County.”

Lillie Mae enjoyed going to school in Langston. “First thing, my daddy made sure we were in school. Regardless. My parents made sure that we did our homework. They required that after we had our chores done and had eaten our supper and we had our lamps going that we studied before we went to bed.”

The Langston School only went through the tenth grade. There were about ten in her class when she graduated from there. Among her fellow graduates were “Kathleen Foster, a Wilhelm boy and a Wilhelm girl.” Afterwards, she spent her final two years of school in Scottsboro. She boarded with her uncle Claude Jones and his family. “He lived on the left on Broad Street as you get to the red light at Parks, next to the barbershop. It is brick now, but it wasn’t then.” Claude had a daughter, Sybil, who was in the same class as Lillie Mae, and that “made me feel pretty good. I would have felt timid if I didn’t have anybody. She had her friends and they accepted me, so I didn’t feel like they looked down on me. I enjoyed going to school there because I had Sybil, but I would hear a train blow at night and I’d be lonesome for home. When I first went to school there, it was by ferry. The bridge was built when I was in school there, but you paid.” She graduated from Scottsboro in 1936, but her senior year only lasted eight months because of lack of funds.

Lillie Mae went to the Presbyterian Church when she was growing up. The church was located just east of downtown Langston and was organized by the Reverend R. D. Shook in

1895. Ruling elders were “N. W. Benson, W. W. Mackey, L. L. Bankston, who I think was Dr. Bankston’s grandfather, and C. P. Hutchinson. The preachers were not on a circuit but came here for us. Preaching was once a month and Sunday School was every Sunday. The Methodist preacher, though, was on a circuit, he had three churches in Marshall County. Brother Stribling was the Presbyterian preacher in 1925, Brother Bridges in 1928, Brother Hutchinson in 1930 and 1931. We also had J. B. Armstrong, who was the principal, Brother Jimmy Jones from Stevenson, and Brother Morgan. I was baptized in the river at Larkins Landing on September 8, 1929.

“The last pastor we had was Robert Cross. In 1957, the superintendent told the people in the church that most of the congregation was moving to Scottsboro, and that there were only a few left, so the church closed. I didn’t go to church for a few months, and daddy was a Methodist anyway, so in 1960 I just joined the Methodist Church, which is on property deeded by Mr. Floyd in 1852. It has been built several times. The current building has been there since 1907. It was the first concrete building here. We just paint it and paint it.” She has been active in this church ever since she joined it.

Ms. Culbert lived at home after she graduated from high school in 1936. She helped with the household chores and worked on the family farm, chopping cotton in the spring and picking cotton in the fall. Of course, it had to be picked by hand. Then, for about a year, she and Bonnie Richey lived in an upstairs room at Coleman Michaels’s house while they ran a country store and gas station in Langston. They also

did some light housekeeping. Then she moved back home.

In 1942 and 1943, she "was called on as an emergency teacher. I didn't have much college, but I went to Florence and to Jacksonville State some during vacation. I enjoyed teaching, and I knew right then that was what I wanted to do. I had a supervisor who helped me a lot. She was Ms. Adele Rivers. She stayed in Scottsboro, and she was very helpful about making flash cards and other things we used. I taught the first through the fourth grade at Langston, and there were sometimes up to forty students in those four grades early on when I was teaching. The school closed in 1950 and consolidated with Scottsboro. Then Mr. Delbert Hicks, who was the superintendent, moved me to Macedonia, and I taught there for nine years. I still lived at home until I married in 1951. I had to drive back and forth to Macedonia on the unpaved roads, except the first winter when the roads were so bad another teacher and I had to stay with the Stricklands up there."

She married Cullen Moore Culbert in 1951. "He was a farmer, and had been in the Army Air Force during the second world war. I didn't know he had a middle name until I saw his birth certificate. He was from Marshall County, and on his birth certificate they had a Meltonsville box number, and there is still a little sign about the town. He was thirty nine and I was thirty four. I was an old maid and he was an old bachelor. I met him at parties, but we had known each other a long time and had had two dates years back when we were real young. We lived with his mother in Marshall County for about a year, while he cattle farmed down there. Then we

lived in the little red house next door to the house I live in now, but it was green then. After we married, I had forty acres here, and we farmed it. And later, he went in with my brother and they rented John Benson's and Mary Lee Hall's farm, and they had TVA land just for cattle when they let them. We had no children but we reared my nephew."

She taught school in Macedonia for nine years after she got married. "Then my mother got real sick, and we just closed our doors and carried our clothes over there and moved in with her until she died. She was bedfast for a year. After that, Bonnie Richey wanted me to be substitute postmaster, so I did. When she retired in 1978, I became the postmaster and stayed twelve years. The new post office was built in 1985. We moved in in January and had open house in March of that year I could have stayed longer, and I was making good money. But Cullen had retired and was in poor health, and he was so lonesome. He would say 'you will never retire now until you die'. But I decided one day to retire, and I did in 1989. We built this house, which is on Davis property. I haven't lived any where much my whole life except on Davis property.

A signal event in the history of Langston occurred in 1939 while Ms. Culbert was still living at home. The gates of the new Guntersville dam were closed on January 17, and the lake was filled by January 27. Much of the land along the Tennessee was covered by water, and the area would never be the same again. "The bottom land was called Hog Jaw. There were a lot of painted houses, nice houses, down that way. Turner Campbell, Tom Ed Morgan and my granddaddy Davis

were some of the people who owned land down there. There were plum orchards where South Sauty Creek and the river went together. A lot of people had to leave, and some of them cried as they tore down their houses. Most of them moved away from here, to Sand Mountain or even up in Tennessee. That is when Langston really began to go downhill. We lost churches and schools and stores because there were so few people left to carry on. The school went down to two teachers, then it got down to one before it was consolidated with Scottsboro. I was the last one that taught up here."

Ms. Culbert is saddened at the thought that all the stores and almost all of the houses she so fondly remembers are gone. The school no longer stands, but the teacherage is still there. "After consolidation, they had bids for the school and grounds. I wish I had put in a bid. Mr. John Benson got the school and tore it down and made a rental house or two. Mr. Johnny Wilborn bought the teacherage, and his widow lives there now."

Her father died in 1955, and her mother followed in 1968. Paul, her half-brother, established a dry-cleaning plant in Scottsboro and is no longer living. Inez, her half-sister, married Dee Evans from Marshall County. They bought the Clyde Spivey farm in Scottsboro. Robert, her full brother, served in World War Two and later became the mail carrier in Langston. He was then transferred to Scottsboro. He is in a rest home in Huntsville now.

Although she lives alone and has no immediate family nearby, Ms. Culbert is anything but bored, and she takes great pride in staying busy. She has multiple hobbies, includ-

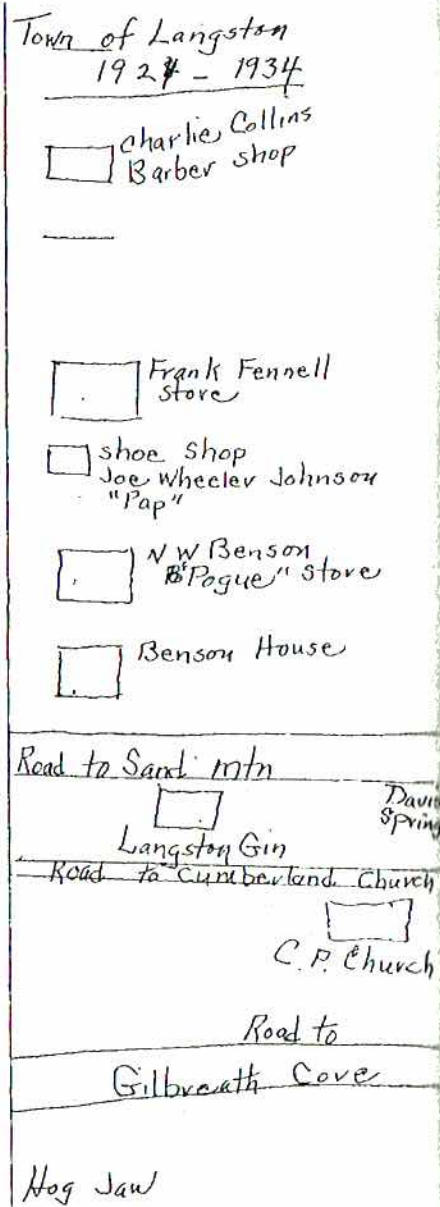
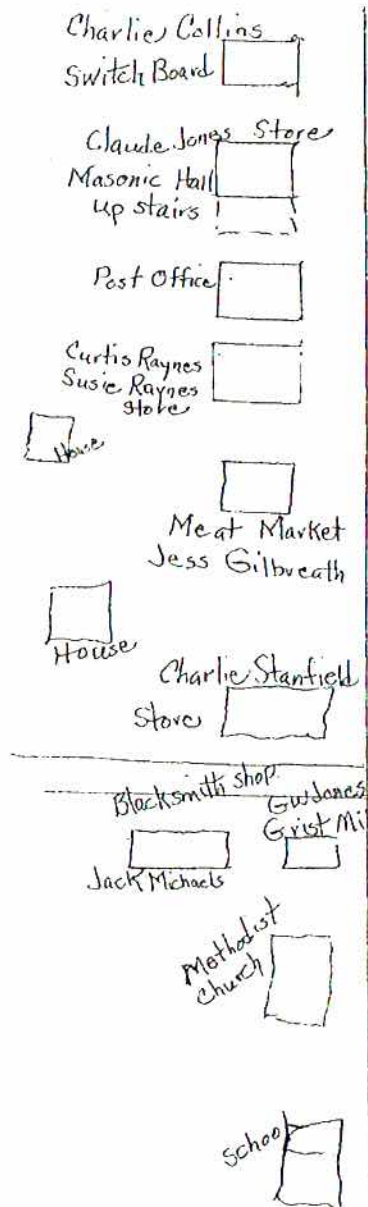
ing gardening, quilting, and reading. She reads religious books, and she has "a lot of Catherine Marshall's books." She also likes love stories, but is now reading "Cold Mountain" by Charles Frazier while she rides her stationary bike thirty minutes every day. She got her father's penchant for newspapers, and reads the Guntersville Gleam, Scottsboro Daily Sentinel, and Huntsville Times daily. A major interest is "family lines" and Langston history, as evidenced by the ledgers she maintains. "I have people come by from Texas and everywhere because I keep these books. The internet is too far ahead of me, so they have to come here." She is also active in the Methodist Church. "They needed me and I needed them. I keep the church records and am active in the bazaars. I help every way I can."

Almost every Saturday, she drives a friend into Scottsboro, about twelve miles away. "I take her to her beauty shop and I go to mine. And then I go and pick her up, and if we have any business to take care of or any shopping to do, we do that. Then we eat lunch somewhere."

She is proud to be in good health. Her only major medical problem was "spinal fluid leakage from her brain" about 1977, but she says they "got it patched up" and it hasn't happened again. She is careful about her diet, and this coupled with her exercise, interests, and activities that keep her mind and body active should hold her in good stead for a long time.

I met with Ms. Culbert several times over a period of a couple of months. Our conversations were interrupted on

A map of the town of Langston, circa 1921-1934, drawn by Ms. Lillie Mae Davis Culbert



numerous occasions as she referred to her ledgers or searched for some of her old photographs. On one occasion, she assured me that, as a teacher, she knew rules of grammar but that she didn't mind if I quoted her using her everyday way of talking.

Perhaps the highlight of our sessions was the morning she took me on a tour of the Langston area. She pointed out the open field where the two-story house she was born had stood until it burned. We saw the teacherage, and she showed me the Methodist Church with its painted cement blocks. Not a one of the old stores in the village is still standing. "They are all long gone," she told me with a sad note in her voice. Actually, not a single store, old or new, is to be found, and only a few of the older houses remain. The post office and the town hall are the only "newer" buildings around. The site of the Mighty Haig Circus is still an open field. The old gin, just off the Gap Road, is also history except for a few odd pieces of rusting machinery.

Of course, she could not show me Davis Landing, Hog Jaw, Gilbreath Cove, old Coffeetown, Edgar Springs or Larkins Landing—they are all underneath Guntersville Lake. Just north of Langston, though, she did point out a barely discernible, overgrown lane that was once the road to Larkins Landing.

During our tour, she introduced me to her longtime friend Bonnie Richey, several years her senior. Bonnie is also extremely well-versed on Langston history and lore, and she showed me even more old pictures of Langston and its citizens that were taken in the years when she and Lillie Mae were growing up.

My last meeting with Lillie Mae was early on a Tuesday

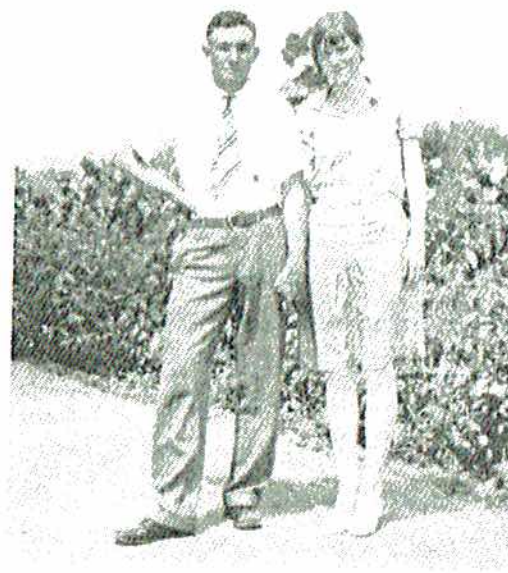
morning following a weekend ice storm that had downed power lines, and her power was still off. As I was walking to her front door, a car with a woman driver stopped on the road and followed my every move, then she pulled into the driveway and asked if there was a problem (I think she actually wanted to know what a stranger was doing at Ms. Culbert's house). She still seemed somewhat dubious even after I introduced myself. Then, when I went into Ms. Culbert's house, I discovered that a neighbor was also inside making sure that she was okay. With her propane gas heat, she was getting by without any problems, but I was greatly impressed that Langston was such a close-knit, caring community. It also showed the degree to which her neighbors care for the town "historian."

After my sessions with Ms. Culbert, I decided that even though Langston may not be as prosperous as it once was, its memory will survive for many years because of the efforts of caring citizens such as Ms. Culbert and Ms. Richey.

JAMES NORWOOD CLEMENS

I first heard of Mr. Jim Clemens from a friend who knew I wanted to interview some native Jackson Countians eighty years old or over. I was somewhat dubious when she told me he was about ninety, and she tactfully attempted to reassure me that he still had his wits about him and had an excellent memory.

She volunteered to call and ask if I could come over to talk to him. She did, he agreed, and I made a follow-up call about eight thirty one morning in late July, 1999. I asked when a convenient time for him would be. "Well, I'm going to drive to a funeral in Scottsboro this evening that begins at two." "How about this morning?" "I reckon that'll be all right." So, an hour later I knocked on his door.



James and Sue Lee, in 1928, before they were married

Mr. Clemens lives on Roberts Road in Sauty Bottom, which is about as far west as you can go in the city of Scottsboro. His house is west of highway 79, just north of highway 72 and near the backwater of the Tennessee River. The street (or road, more accurately) is paved but narrow and passes through pleasant fields and in front of well kept brick and frame houses. Road signs and house numbers are erratic, however, so I had to stop and inquire of a lady walking if she knew where Mr. Clemens lived.

"You mean Senior or Junior?" she asked, then informed me that the Senior's house was the second brick house on the left going back the way I had come.

Mr. Clemens lives in an attractive brick house, surrounded by a large yard that demands frequent mowing and other upkeep. Behind the house is a large garden, and adjacent to the front is a smaller one (I found out that he maintains the yard and the latter garden). I had expected him, at ninety years of age, to be small, wiry, dried up, and wispy. The man answering the door, however, was a spitting image of his son, (who I knew as a fellow member of Rotary), except he was not as tall. He had a broad, essentially unlined face and the alert eyes of a much younger person. His body was wide and appeared muscular without harboring much excess fat. I was greeted warmly in a voice that was strong and direct, not quivery as I had expected. His handshake was firm, and I got the impression he could still put in a full day's work on the farm. I had seen many men in their sixties who looked older and less fit than Mr. Clemens. A slight limp seemed to be his only limitation.

He welcomed me into his home and directed me into his

living room, where I sat on a sofa and he in an adjacent lounge chair. The part of the house that I could see was sparkling clean and tastefully furnished. He proudly showed me a photograph of his son (whom he called "Son"), which most people, including me, took to be of the father. He also showed me a picture of his parents standing beside a 1937 Ford and a drawing made from a photograph of Son when he was a small boy.

I explained to Mr. Clemens what I had in mind-I would ask questions and let him answer, taping the conversation as we went along. I had been concerned that he would ramble, because my friend had told me he talked for a long time about growing up when she had called him. Besides, he had started in with some tales before I could get the tape recorder set up. I shouldn't have been concerned, however, because he answered my questions fairly succinctly. I couldn't have asked for a more cooperative individual, and my friend was right-his memory is wholly intact.

On August 23, 1908, Dr. Gaddis, a physician in the Aspel community, traveled by horse and buggy several miles to the home of Thomas and Nancy Clemens. The call was not social but professional-Mrs. Clemens was in labor. Eventually, Dr. Gaddis delivered a baby boy, named James Norwood Clemens by his parents. Ninety years later, this same James N. Clemens lives on the same corner where he was born.

Mr. Jim Clemens is the fourth generation of the Clemens family to live in Jackson County, and the third generation to

be born in the county. According to Mr. Clemens, his forebears, even those on the maternal side, can be traced back much further than these four generations, although some of the family history may be apocryphal in nature. A genealogist named Clemens (but no relation) has told the family that the daughter of an English earl married a Clemens in England and had several children, one of whom may have been Mr. Clemens's ancestor. Her husband died, and the widow Clemens traveled to America on the ship "George" with an entourage that included two servants. On the way, she met a clerk on the ship, whom she married. Sometime later, she returned to England, where she died. Furthermore, tradition has it that Pocahontas sailed to England on another voyage of the same ship. She is not considered to be an ancestor; however, some have speculated that John Rolfe, who married Pocahontas, may even be an ancestor, since he was said to be a Ligons on his mother's side (Mr. Clemens's maternal grandmother was a Ligons). And a respected genealogist has told Mr. Clemens that he may even be kin to King William on the Ligons's side of the family.

At any rate, the Clemens settled in the Virginia Commonwealth, in the James River area, and later on they moved to Dinwiddie County, where one of them became a sheriff. The Clemens, or at least Mr. Clemens's branch, eventually settled in Maryville, Tennessee. Adam, the brother of one of his ancestors, sired a son named Samuel Clemens, also known as Mark Twain.

But how did they wind up in Jackson County? As Mr. Clemens tells it, "My great Grandpa Samuel George Clemens and some others were on their way to Texas in a covered

wagon and some of them got sick down here in Woodville where Sprout Spring is on that old road starting to go down that mountain. One of them took malaria and they couldn't go on so they come back here to the Stevens place. Later, they moved to a place about where the Taco Bell is now, and later still to the Mason place where that aluminum plant is. And then grandpa bought this place here, it must have been about 1900."

Grandpa James Perry Clemens came from a large family—he had five brothers and five sisters. "There was Will, who went to Oklahoma, Joe, Dan, who went to Texas, Sam, who went to Mississippi, Grandpa, George, Rebecca, who I don't know nothing about, Millie, who married Uncle John Miller, Margaret, who died in 1911, Annie, who went to Texas, and Liz, who was an old maid."

His grandfather was married three times. The first was to Sarah Ligons, Mr. Clemens's grandmother, to whom his father was born in 1880. His grandmother, though, had a young and tragic death. As he tells it, "She died on account of she had a cancer. She had seen her grandmother die of cancer and she didn't want to. And this doctor come down from Chattanooga and operated on her at Will Hollis's house, who was a neighbor and Clyde Hollis's daddy, up there pretty close to where the grammar school is. That old doctor must have been drunk or something, 'cause she died, she had walked up there but she bled to death. My grandfather and Sarah had three other boys besides my father—Terrell, Scott, and William Baker, who they called Daisy. After Sarah died, he married the second time to a Rounsavall, and they had two girls, Eva and Sara. His second wife was sickly a lot and she died.

When she died, my grandpa married again, he married this old maid who was from Woodville. She was Dr. Rayford Hodges's aunt. She was fifty two and she helped raise Eva and Sarah. They lived over here on the Davidson's place when he married her but they bought this place after he married her. She lived to be 102 years old."

Mr. Clemens did not know his Grandmother Ligon's brothers and sisters very well. Nor does he know much about his mother's family. She was a Black, and her mother was a Robinson. They came from up around Johnson City, Tennessee. His mother was born in 1884 or 1885, and her family moved to the Woodville area when she was small. She had two brothers and three sisters.

Mr. Clemens's grandfather bought the land on which Mr. Clemens was born about 1900. He remembers the house in which he first lived as "having one room that was weather stripped up and down, and part of it was log then and there was an outside room that you could cook in." When he was three or four years old, his father bought 120 acres from Walker McCutchen-the land adjoined his grandfather's place. So his father moved his family up the road a quarter of a mile or so into a house that "old Dr. Story had built." He remembers it as "a log house that had logs on each end and a big hall in it. There were two big rooms and a room upstairs. A big hall was between the two rooms downstairs. There was a chimney on each end. It came a rainy spell and there was a stove in one of the chimneys and breakfast was being cooked and that chimney fell down, but it didn't catch the house on fire." He also remembers there was a spring nearby.

Mr. Clemens was the second of five siblings. Ira was born in 1906, Mr. Clemens in 1908, Guy in 1910 or 1911, Nora about 1913, and Aubrey about 1916. With a twinkle in his eye, Mr. Clemens remembers that the four youngest children had the following sleeping arrangement-"Nora slept in the room where my momma and daddy was. Guy and Aubrey slept in the other room with me. Aubrey would sleep with me one night and Guy the next, we would try to mix him up since he was the baby."

Mr. Clemens went to McCutchen School, about a half mile west of the house. The school was on about an acre of land and was nestled near the bottom of a ridge. "The school was a pretty big building but just had one room. The school mostly had one teacher but sometimes we had two. One of the teachers was Miss Lilly Porter. Another was Miss Giddeons, she was a crippled kind of person, and there was a Vaughn or something, he rode a horse up from New Hope and he taught a year or two. There was Lawrence Varney and Miss Rainey taught up here, she died a while back, she lived to be about a hundred. She lived up there on Tupelo Pike, but most of the others lived around here somewhere. We were taught science, arithmetic, and English. They had areas in the big room that they called classes. Some of the chairs were turned one way and others different ways. The teachers taught one class, then they taught another, and they would move the chairs around some. The ones they wouldn't be teaching would be studying or doing homework."

Of course, all age children would be in the same room. Mr. Clemens recalls, "There were two that I thought of as

ladies there, Maude Boggus and Amy Lewis, and I thought they was grown, but of course they weren't hardly. They wore them old velvet coats, and I sat between them up there and I stayed warm. They were students, too." He remembers that the students would carry red cedar logs from the mountain near the school for warmth in the winter. Money for running the school was scarce, and the students had to buy their own books. At times, finances were so depleted that school sessions were only held in the summer because there was not enough money to pay teachers. One summer, when he was ten or eleven years old, he went up to his Uncle John Miller's place in the fall to pick cotton, and he just stayed with his Uncle John and Aunt Miller during this time.

Mr. Clemens attended McCutchen School from age six until he was about fourteen or fifteen. He then attended ninth grade in Scottsboro for a term or so (the school was located where Page is now). While in school there, he lived with his Uncle Dan Clemens. "He was my great uncle, he was well known up there, and he used to run a store. He also run a dairy, and I helped him deliver a little milk and stuff." Like many young people in those days, Mr. Clemens did not attend any more school, but "If I had lived up there close I would have."

Mr. Clemens father was a farmer. "He was a hard worker, and he was pretty hard on me, and we had to work pretty hard. I guess the way he was raised up made him a little bit nervous, but he helped people and wanted to do the right thing, and my mother did too. I was about eight or nine when I started plowing with a mule. But I just barely could.

We grew cotton mostly, some corn and hay, a few hogs. And he bought another farm, it was mostly wetland, he never did much good with it. Of course, TVA came and got some of the land, and he bought my grandpa's place about 1914. He finally bought all of them out."

But life was not all work when he was growing up. He remembers there were occasional ballgames in a pasture or somewhere, and they would also go swimming. "We used to go to a place in this branch up here, it had a pretty deep hole. Then later on we went down here to Sauty Creek, Sand Bar we called it. It was about eight to ten feet deep." He also remembers that "One time we went up to Scottsboro to a fair, they called it a show, I was a little fella. They had it where Gay Tred is across the railroad track. And a train run, and I was a little boy, and it almost scared me to death nearly, that big old train coming through. We spent the day up there." He also had friends he rabbit hunted with, such as Cecil Boggus, Grant Lewis, the Steely boys, the Beards "from over yonder across the creek," and Skinny Roden. He says he wasn't "sweet on any little girls around here, not much," but does admit that "I wrote a few notes or something." He also remembers a failed attempt at learning how to sing. "We had a singing school one time at the schoolhouse. They taught how to sing high and low notes. And I went and I never could learn all the shapes notes, so I never could sing too good."

He recalls that many more people lived in the Sauty Bottom when he was growing up than live there now. Some of the names he remembers include Sam Hollis, Miss May Hay, Milt Owens, and Billy Smith. Larry Maynard and a Mr. Metcalf used to live in the area but both moved to Pisgah.

Georgia Barkley was also a neighbor. "She had cancer, and she went to Vanderbilt to have it operated on. Back then, you had to take your own sheets and pillowcases and gowns with you. And my mother helped her make all of them. She had that operation, and she lived about thirty years after that. She never liked tomato soup after that, she said that's all they fed her. I was about seven or eight then." Of course, they lived next door to his Grandfather Clemens. Mr. Clemens remembers that the old gentleman "used to come down this road every morning and every evening to our house with his hands behind his back and then he would go back home. He had a nickname for most of us. He called my sister 'Bill' and Aubrey 'Hobo'. He just called me 'Jim'."

His family occasionally went to Scottsboro, but it was almost a full day's trip because of "all of them mudholes." Scottsboro "was not nearly as big as it is now, and there weren't as many stores." They rarely went to Huntsville, and the only way to get there was through Larkinsville. Sam Hollis, the Smiths, and Metcalfs had little stores here." As was the case with most other neighboring families, a large portion of their food came from the farm, including vegetables, hogs, chickens, eggs, milk cows, butter, etc. "We always killed three or four hogs a year, and we would render the lard and keep it. We had a smokehouse, in the spring it would be full and in the fall there wouldn't be nothing in it much. We didn't have to buy nothing much." Before electricity came, they used Aladdin lamps, which "gave a whole lot of light."

His family had an icebox when he was growing up. About 1925, his father put in a generator, and "I reckon he had a

refrigerator then. Later on, he got a gas refrigerator." It wasn't until the nineteen thirties that they got electricity. "When they put the electricity in, they were kind of slow. My daddy got his tractor and pulled some of the poles into the field and helped them out."

Initially, the family traveled by wagon but got a buggy later on. Some of the other families had a two-seated surrey. It wasn't until about 1937 that his father bought his first car. The state of the roads in the area, however, precluded comfortable travel regardless of the mode of transportation. They were not paved, and were muddy with big potholes. The Clemens lived near where the road from Woods Cove split, one branch headed north towards Larkinsville and the other headed west to Larkins Landing (near the current location of Goose Pond), where freight was ferried back and forth across the Tennessee River (Mr. Clemens remembers going down to the landing and watch big black men load and unload freight.).

A small creek that originated at the foot of Cumberland Mountain emptied into the Tennessee, and there was considerable backwater even before the dam was built. Actually, if the river was high, the backwater got almost as high as it is now. There was not a bridge across the creek and backwater until Mr. Clemens was a child. "They built a steel bridge across that creek, and my daddy hauled the stuff from town in zero weather. After the bridge was built, you could go to Dry Cove and to the cave, but there wasn't no real road on across that mountain, just an old rough road."

The road from Woods Cove had a convoluted history, similar to that of its route. "It came from around the moun-

tain on the second bench. Way back then, there was an old church when the road went up on the bench. They went that way because it was muddy down below, I reckon. Then they moved it down, it was just an old dirt road. When I was about sixteen or seventeen, they made up money for the road, the people put up part of it and the county part of it. My dad put in six hundred dollars, and later he put in three or four hundred more, and Grandpa Clemens put in some. We graded and took care of the road. We started grading at Woods Cove Road. We had a pair of mules, and another man had a pair, so they built this road over four or five years almost to Aspel, to where Reuben Dulaney lived. The mules and plows were used to tear up the dirt and ditch it, and the dirt was hauled by mule, but later on it was hauled by truck. They paid four dollars a day, and you worked ten hours a day, too." He remembers that "from Scottsboro to Huntsville, you went on the old Larkinsville Road, across the railroad track, then they built another one on this side of the track."

Mr. Clemens remembers being told that many years before his time a road went up a hollow and across July Mountain. "The courthouse used to be on this side of July Mountain, it was in what was called Sauty. Then they moved it to Bellefonte. The road was moved back off the mountain because the Mississippi Territory came to the mountain, and they thought it was in the Territory, so they moved it."

About the only time they put on dress clothes when he was growing up was to go to church. The family went to a missionary Baptist church in the old McCutchen building, in which the church and school were located. Eventually, "They finally moved the church over on the road over here,

and they moved the school over to the House of Happiness. They built an extra log building up there, and they had a two room school. And they finally done away with that school." The House of Happiness had been started by a Miss Martin "who owned eighty acres at the old Maynor place. She came out here and she was going to reform everybody, I reckon. A lot of people lived on the Snodgrass place, and they was real poor. She had a school over there and she had two or three teachers. They had an Episcopal church and Sunday School, and they always had a good Christmas tree. And them little kids' eyes would shine when they got them presents. It was up here about two miles, it used to be Burr Maynor's. It had a spring there, and he had a way to bring a bucket up a wire to get water there. He built a big house there, but it burned up later." The House of Happiness also burned and no longer exists.

Mr. Clemens does not think his family was either rich or poor during his years growing up in Sauty Bottom. "We just had a common living. We didn't have no fancy clothes. Some people was poor, some it didn't matter what was going on, they didn't have nothing. But we always tried to plan ahead a little. One time we was going to North Carolina and we was up there and they showed us that old stuff the Indians used, and that was just about the same as what we had used, them pans and everything, and I said 'that's the way we was raised'."

Mr. Clemens's life took a drastic change when he was twenty years old. He had been up at a neighbor's house and met Sue Lee Lowe, who worked at a hosiery mill in Scottsboro. Her father was originally from North Carolina, but she was

raised at various places in Jackson County. Mr. Clemens and Sue Lee married in 1928 when he was twenty. Soon afterward, the young couple moved to Scottsboro, and he "worked on Comer Bridge out here in 1929, and I helped pour concrete for that pier, which is seventy foot in the ground and seventy foot up. They had to go down that deep because they hit a cave." He remembers that the two of them made good money during this year. "My wife made three and a quarter and I made three or four dollars a day. What with overtime, we made three hundred and fifty dollars one month, and school teachers didn't make but sixty to eighty back then."

After a year in the city, Mr. Clemens and his wife moved back into the Sauty Bottom community. For the next fourteen years they lived "here on grandpa's place, which my daddy had bought in 1914. It was partly the house I grew up in, part of it was gone. Then I moved up to the Snodgrass place, I bought five hundred acres up there, and stayed up there twenty-three years. It was about two miles up the Larkinsville Road here." In 1965, Mr. Clemens built the brick house he now lives in, on forty acres he inherited from his father. The house is located on the spot in which he was born.

He farmed with his father, mostly raising cotton, which was twenty to twenty five cents a pound in the nineteen twenties. Initially, they picked the cotton by hand, and he remembers that once he picked three hundred eighty pounds in a single day. One year, he got three hundred twenty bales on one hundred fifty eight acres, but they had a picker by then. The cotton was taken to one of the two gins in Scottsboro. "One of them was down there across from where that Sonic place used to be close to downtown. That one was owned by

John Benson and Marvin and Turner Campbell. The other one was owned by Snodgrass and was across the railroad over there opposite from the freight depot. There was also a gin at Larkins Landing, but that was when I was real little."

They also raised some corn and "cut a few logs." Plowing on the farm was done with mule and plow. He had two or three mules and his father had three or four. Over a period of time, the farming operation got bigger and bigger, and Mr. Clemens has bought and sold various parcels of land in the area. He still owns several of these parcels. He remembers that in about 1935 he bought sixty acres near where the old McCutchen school was located. "I bought it for six hundred seventy five dollars. I had three hundred fifty dollars, and I went to see Mr. Rice Jacobs, and I told him I wanted to borrow all of it, and I would take that three hundred fifty and make a crop. I paid it off in one or two years. Then in 1941, I had about six thousand dollars and I made a down payment on some other land." He also bought a large parcel of "mountain land between here and Woodville from the Kennamer heirs, and the new road came through it." He still owns a large portion of this tract.

He relishes telling about a place his father owned just north of the home place. "This woman was back here visiting from Texas and she fell and broke her neck or something and wanted to be buried right there at that hill. She was some of Frank Griggs's kinfolks. There are stacked rocks by the road where she is buried. And this guy came here and wanted to buy it for a house site and wanted to get them rocks off, and I said that ain't no house site, that's a grave."

He doesn't remember the depression years being particu-

larly difficult with the exception of one year. "One year I didn't make much, only four or five bales of cotton, I barely got by. But we did OK, you could get by for a year on three hundred dollars back then." Early on in the depression, about 1929 or 1930, he bought a nine tube Truetone Radio from Sears Roebuck. The radio was operated by battery (electricity was not available in Sauty Bottom), and they listened mostly to the Grand Ole Opry and similar programs. An uncle who lived nearby had just gotten a radio about the same time, and "he was taking a bath and he had his radio on, and it said 'good morning' and he jumped up out of that tub and run to the kitchen."

Mr. Clemens and Sue Lee had a little girl not long after they returned to Sauty Bottom, but disaster struck soon thereafter. "She lived just nineteen days. She had a little cold and we put her down, and when we went to get her, she was dead. She had some kind of syndrome, we just couldn't believe it." In 1933, however, a second child was born. "His name is Robert Norwood Clemens, I don't know why I didn't name him Jim, but I didn't. I call him Son. He started to school over close to the House of Happiness. They had moved the old McCutchen school into an extra building up there. There was more than enough children here to have a district school, and they wanted to build one, they had a lot and some money, but the county never built it. So he went to that school at the House of Happiness, but then they done away with that school." He then went to grammar school in Scottsboro where the Heilig-Meyers store is now. "He rode his bicycle up to Miss Madge Porter's, she lived about where the telephone place is now, and she took him and Allen Laws's

boy on to school, she charged them a nickel a day. Then he went to high school where Page is now, and that is where I went a little."

He remembers Son as a hard worker who could pick two hundred pounds of cotton a day when he was ten to twelve years old. But Mr. Clemens says that Son "retired" at about thirteen or so because "he played ball a lot and that took a lot of his time." Son, also known as "Big Foot," played football at the University of Georgia and in the National Football League until injuries ended his career. He is now a successful businessman in Huntsville, and has recently built a new house adjacent to the location of the old McCutchen School.

Mr. Clemens's brother Aubrey lives next door to the old home place. "He went to Auburn and was a principal at Woodville when Mr. Phillips, the superintendent, died, and they appointed Aubrey to replace him, and then he was re-elected for two or three terms. He was superintendent for about fifteen years." He is eighty-three years old now. Guy was a farmer, and he died in his seventies. Ira and her husband always lived on a farm in the area, and she is dead now. "Nora taught school a year or two, then she married and her old man went to Auburn and he was an electrician. And Nora then went into a hardware store business in Columbia, Tennessee, and they finally got a Merle Norman store in Bowling Green. She is eighty-six now and lives in Columbia." Mr. Clemens's mother died in 1943 at the age of 59, and his father died in 1948 when he was 68 years old.

Mr. Clemens "mainly" quit farming in 1972. "After that, I raised some little crops, had some cows and hay, just

pidled.” His wife died in 1991 at eighty-two years of age. Since then, he has continued to live alone in the house he built in 1965, but he is still self-sufficient, remains active, and drives himself about the countryside and in town. “Every Tuesday I go to Senior Citizens in the morning. We have bingo and I play rook about an hour and a half. Then on Wednesday evening I play rook, about two and a half hours at the senior citizens place on the lake there. Every once in a while I go to that breakfast they have at the senior citizens building every other month.” He also does most of his yard work, and uses a riding mower to cut his large yard. In addition, he has a fairly large garden that he takes care of. He admits that he recently had a “woman friend” but she has died. He declines to say whether he has any prospects to replace her.

Mr. Clemens attributes his long life to “working hard, relaxing pretty good, sleeping good, being blessed with a good appetite and never smoking.” He admits to drinking a “little” alcohol on occasion, and he has always kept some on hand to mix with sugar and honey for colds.

I spent several sessions taping conversations with Mr. Clemens, and, after each session, I seemed to be more weary than he. When the last session ended, he asked if I would like for him to give me a tour of the area, which is what I had planned to request, anyway. So I drove while he gave directions and talked.

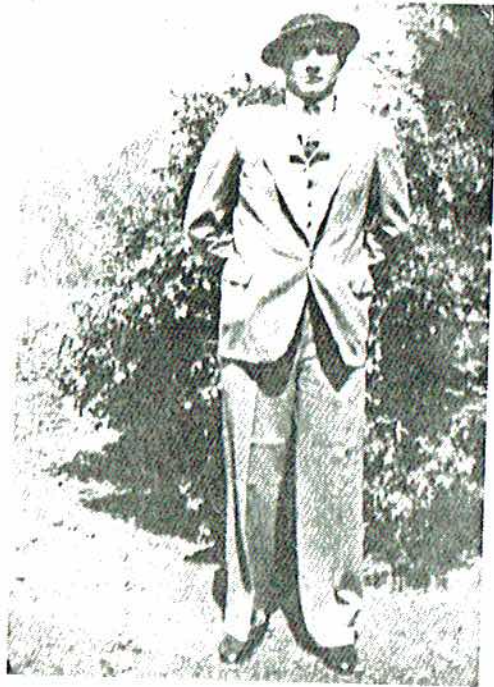
First, we went down a narrow lane to the house where

Son formerly lived, then up a long, winding, narrower lane to Son's recently built house. Mr. Clemens pointed out the location of the old McCutchen School in a field nearby. We then rode about a half mile or so north of Mr. Clemens's house, and he showed me where the woman from Texas is buried. Very near the pavement is a jumbled, somewhat scattered pile of large stones, and he indicated that he plans to restack them in a more organized fashion.

Returning to his house, he took me to the smaller garden, the one at the front edge of his house. The garden was well-kept and seemed to be productive. He spent some time locating watermelons that weren't quite ripe, and then he picked some tomatoes and peppers (“called cowhorn because they come from cows”) for me. He then sat in a chair under a tree near the garden, still ready to talk about growing up.

A month or so later, I gave him a copy of a rough draft that I had worked up of our conversations. Soon thereafter, he called to inform me that I had made some mistakes. In early September, I visited him again to clear up the errors. He had read the entire thing very carefully, making the necessary corrections on the paper. I thought to myself, “If I live to be ninety, I probably won't be able to see, much less concentrate like that.”

Mr. Clemens told me at that time that he had a young woman friend, only eighty-five or so, who might become a girl friend. I told him I knew an active ninety-five year old lady, but he informed me that he didn't want one that old. With that, our visit ended.



James Clemens in 1930

James Clemens in 1999

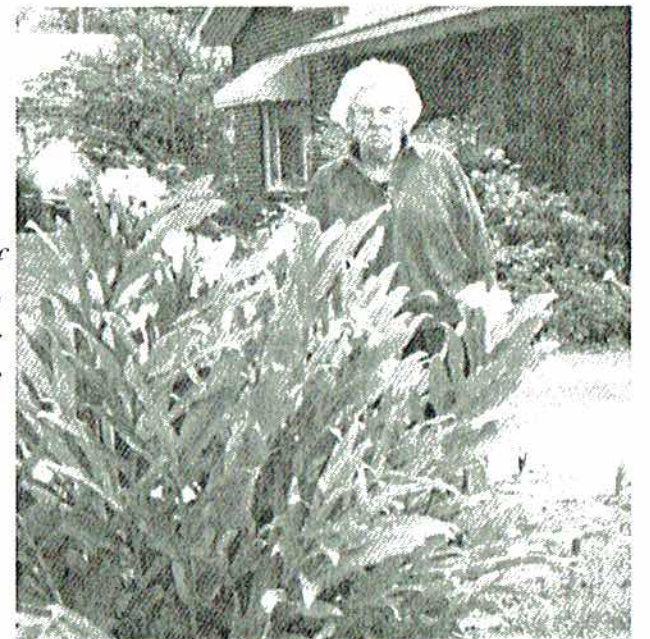


GERTRUDE ISABELLA STOCKTON

One of the ladies I profiled suggested that I talk to Gertrude Stockton, whom I knew of but did not know personally. So this lady talked to Ms. Stockton during one of their frequent rook games and reported back to me that "Gertrude will receive you."

She lives in a very pleasant house on an older street in Scottsboro. The house and yard are spotless. The lady who greeted me at the door certainly did not appear to be ninety-three years old but at least two decades younger. She was short but not frail. Her posture was upright, and she had a brisk natural gait. Of course, she was well-groomed and dressed.

A recent photo of Gertrude Stockton in front of her house



She greeted me with a somewhat low but non-wavering voice. Actually, I wondered if I was in the right house or speaking to wrong person.

Ms. Stockton proved an apt historian with an excellent memory, both old and recent. In contrast to some of the other senior citizens I talked with, she was not a yarn-spinner. She answered questions courteously, slowly, and deliberately, but she stopped after answering, without expounding further (this made transcribing relatively easy). My main problem as interviewer was arranging convenient times for her—she always seemed to be going somewhere or having people in. Once, I arrived just at the time her ninety-three year old friend Cora Michaels drove up. They had been gone most of the day, and Cora had to come back for something.

So, I knew that I had lucked into an opportunity to interview an unusual lady.

On November 9, 1906, Erasmus Hunter Stockton and his wife, Madella Jane, received a lady visitor into their home. This was not an everyday, routine sort of visit, however. Mrs. Stockton was due to deliver her seventh child, and the visitor was her cousin, the community midwife. After the usual scurrying about, a daughter, Gertrude Stockton, was delivered.

The Stocktons lived in the Pleasant Hill area of southern Jackson County, Alabama, about a mile north of the Marshall County line. It was known as Scottsboro Route Three at that time. They owned a farm of "two to three hundred acres that went from the river up to the hills, and we also owned some on the top of the hill." Ms. Stockton believes that her grand-

father, William Stockton, homesteaded the land they lived on, but she is uncertain where he came from. His first wife died. His second was her step-grandmother, but that "was before I remember and I don't know her name. I know that my daddy had three whole brothers and I think two or three half brothers. I never did know any of them. Two went to Clovis, New Mexico, and one went to Texas."

She is also uncertain when her maternal ancestors came to Jackson County. Her maternal grandfather Gross had a grist mill "somewhere about where Johnnie Gross Coleman's house is now, just above our place going towards Scottsboro. His wife's name was Jerusha. My mother was from a large family. There were ten of them. Two died when they were real young. Several settled around here. My uncle Jimmy Gross had several children who live around here now."

Gertrude's father Hunter (as he was called) was in his fifties when she was born, and her mother Madella was thirteen years younger. They had seven children, Gertrude being the youngest. Paul William was born in 1890, John Gross in 1892, Lillian Jerusha in 1896, Mattie Lou in 1898, Benton Cargile in 1900, Beryl Madella in 1903, and Gertrude in 1906. Her mother died of pneumonia when Gertrude was only fifteen months old, so she was raised by her father and older siblings.

She has no memory of her mother but has fond memories of her father. "He was a small man. He evidently had polio when he was small, and his left arm was sort of withered. During my lifetime he didn't do much on the farm, he couldn't. He tended to the barn, crib, and the hogs. My brother John stayed on the farm and ran it. My dad was not

a strict disciplinarian. He did not believe in spanking or whipping kids. The other children told me my mother believed in it, though. My dad did not remarry, so I just grew up in the house with him and the other kids. I was the baby, and Daddy spoiled me.

"I don't know how much education he had, but he could spell better than any of his children. One time, he ran for superintendent of education in the county, and his best friend, Brother Bridges, a Presbyterian preacher, beat him by one vote. That didn't bother their friendship for he preached the funeral when daddy died.

"My dad could think of more chores for us to do. He would say to me and my sisters, 'Come and let's go pick up apples for the hogs, come and let's go and cut those big old weeds for the hogs,' and we laughed and told him that the hogs ate better than we did. I also had to do a lot of household chores, ordinary chores."

The house she grew up in was on a "pretty good gravel road, about where Highway 79 is now. It had three big bedrooms, a dining room, a back porch, a side porch, and a front porch. We usually had about two kids per bed. We had a cook stove that burned wood. We had an outside toilet, and you had to go through the chicken yard to get there. We had an icebox for ice. Before electricity, there was a fellow who came down twice a week, and you could get ice. We used kerosene lamps at night. Finally we got Aladdin lamps, they were good."

The farm extended down to the Tennessee River, about a mile away. "It flooded every year, and you never had to use fertilizer on the river land. The floods came during the win-

ter, not in the summer." She remembers that during the winters, before TVA, the backwaters would come up to within a hundred or two feet of the house, almost as close as the lake is now. "When it come up like that, we would canoe across the backwater to the ridge several hundred feet away. And once, during a cold winter, people would walk or ride a bicycle over to the ridge." There were marked fluctuations in the river, though. "I remember one time that the river was so low in the summer that someone drove a car across the river somewhere between our house and Scottsboro, up near Larkin's Landing."

The two main crops on the farm were cotton and corn, but they also grew some peas and soybeans. "We raised most of our food. Hogs, chickens, turkeys, geese, guineas. One time my dad found a guinea nest that had forty eggs in it." Ms. Stockton also recalls they would "dig a hole in the garden and during the winter you could go and get your fresh turnips out." She also remembers that they used to own a farm on the edge of Gunter's Mountain. "My brother and the renter of that farm would carry on a conversation up and down the hill. He would come to the edge of the mountain, and my brother would holler up to him. The sound would carry that well."

Living on a farm necessitated hard work, but there was time for fun and play as well. "We played marbles and all the games that came in. We played a lot outside, and there was a real good swing under a cedar tree. My father had a battery operated radio, and we listened to the news and country music, but I never liked country music much. I learned to play piano from a lady in New Hope. We would go up there,

and I would take music lessons from her. We had a piano at home, too." They went into Scottsboro "probably less than once a week, and we went in a buggy, not a wagon. Our shoes and clothes and things came from there. Of course, we had a Sears and Roebuck catalog, but I don't remember ever ordering from it." Actually, there were stores in the Pleasant Hill community. "We had one cousin, a McCamey, he had a store right across from us when I was growing up but not when I was older. My two uncles, Bill Gross's dad James and an old bachelor uncle Bob who lived up on the hill, had a store near there."

Transportation was by horse and buggy for years, and she has a vivid memory of the first car she saw. "Someone told us a car was coming up the road, and I remember that was the first car I ever saw. In a few years, we got one. My uncle, Johnnie Coleman's granddaddy, had a Ford coupe. I remember going to his house and looking it over. I did ride the train some when I was little and when I was in school in Woodville. I caught it in Scottsboro."

One of Ms. Stockton's favorite memories were the community activities in Pleasant Hill. "When I was growing up, we had community parties. And there was a church up there. It was built by the Woodmen of the World; it is gone now. Every fourth Sunday in February we put on a two hour play in the church. People from everywhere came, from Woodville and all around. The community put it on, and I helped in it and was in some of them. The superintendent of the Sunday School usually was in charge. They were there the whole time I was growing up and for the two or three years I taught in the community. They were good plays."

Not surprisingly, church played an important role in her social as well as spiritual life as she was growing up. "We just grew up going to Sunday school and church. Everybody in the area just went. It was the social center, too. I went to Sunday school every Sunday at Pleasant Hill. There was no preaching there so we went to church at New Hope in the same building where the school was. The Methodist preacher came once a month, and he also had churches at Oak Grove, Woods Cove I think, and several others. The other denominations met on other Sundays. We went to some of those services, too, if it was convenient."

Ms. Stockton started to school at New Hope, "two miles up the road toward Scottsboro. We had to walk to the school there. The school house was also the church for the Methodists, Presbyterians, and Church of Christ. We generally started in November and went four or five months. Sometimes we went for a while in the summer. The school went through the eighth or ninth grade. All the classes were together in one room. There was just one teacher back then, who was Bill Jones's daddy. The teacher taught one class while the others studied. I must have studied at school. I know I never did take any books home to study. There was a potbellied stove in the school, but we were comfortable.

"I went to Woodville for the eighth grade. It was a regular school. My older brothers and sisters had gone to Scottsboro, some finished and some didn't. I went to Woodville because I could stay with my aunt. Then in the ninth, tenth, and eleventh grades I went to Snead in Boaz. My sister was a senior there when I went. It was a northern Methodist school

and went for nine months. I stayed in the dorm and didn't like that. I didn't like being away from home, either. Then they were too strict on you, they wouldn't let you go anywhere without a faculty member or something. I know my brother came over and wanted to take us for a ride, and they wouldn't let us do that. The school was wonderful but I didn't like the dorm. I enjoyed the school work and did well. I graduated in 1925 after finishing the eleventh grade, that is as high as it went. Cora Michaels graduated with me that same year, and she did well, too."

After graduating from high school, she went to college at Montevallo. "It was always my plan to go there. It was a four year college, and I loved it there. I only had two years there, though, because I needed the money. I did get my degree in education later at Florence State by going during the summers. After I left Montevallo, I started teaching at Princeton, up in Paint Rock Valley. I taught there for one year in the first grade. It was a separate school, not in a church, and went at least through junior high. There were several teachers. I boarded with Ms. Beeson when I taught up there. She lived across the road from the school. I didn't have a car, so I got back and forth by catching a ride.

"Then I taught at New Hope for several years. The school only went through the sixth grade, and I taught the fourth, fifth, and sixth. I taught all the subjects they took. A total of maybe twenty kids were in those three grades. There were just two teachers, and the other one taught the first three grades. A partition separated the classes. The school year lasted for seven months. I lived at home when I taught at New Hope. I was teaching there when the depression hit, but we

didn't have to close like some of the schools did. The depression didn't affect us on the farm that much either, not like it did some people. If you were in the country, you grew almost everything you ate."

"After New Hope, I taught at Skyline for about two years when it was a government school. It was not a county school like the others were. When I first went there, it seemed to be kind of thrown together. I taught the second grade. I enjoyed teaching out there; it was fun. I boarded with a Mr. East and roomed with Miss West and Miss Crow, like they say, 'as the crow flies.' Mr. East and his family were from Birmingham and were with the government project. We had a big time at his house. Mr. East would build up a big fire, and we would play rook with his two boys. I came home on the weekends, so I didn't hear much of the music that was played at Skyline. I didn't see Mrs. Roosevelt when she came there."

Ms. Stockton began teaching in Scottsboro in the early nineteen forties and taught there until she retired in 1970. "I taught social studies and science in the seventh grade. At first, the school was where Page is now, until they turned the elementary school at the corner of Charlotte and Broad into a junior high school."

Gertrude had left her family home in the late 1930s, not necessarily of her own volition. "TVA took our land down to the river, about a mile away, because of the dam and the lake. They did not do much clearing in our area because it was mostly farmland. On this side of the river, not many people lived by the river, but the people were unhappy overall. The

old farmers don't care for the TVA." Not only did TVA take some of the Stockton's land, it took the house as well. "They sold the house to somebody, I think from Larkinsville, who tore it down and built another house using a lot of the wood from our old house. TVA kept the land the house was on for about twenty-odd years, and my brother used the land for a hog pasture. Then we bought it back and built first a one bedroom house and then added a second bedroom. After TVA bought the original house, I moved into this house in Scottsboro in 1938, and I've lived here ever since."

But it wasn't only Gertrude who moved into the house—her three sisters moved in as well. So, for many years, four unmarried sisters occupied the same dwelling. "Lillian was the homemaker. Mattie Lou was a secretary in the county superintendent's office for about thirty-odd years. Beryl taught third grade in the Scottsboro schools, and I taught seventh grade. I can't believe four old maids lived in this house." Not only did the four sisters live there, they had "two female boarders, too, and a friend ate with us almost all the time." In addition, other family members stayed with them at various times. Gertrude's brother John continued to live on the old home place and ran the farm, her brother Paul moved to Guntersville where he was a successful merchant, and Benton had the Buick agency in Huntsville. In contrast to the sisters, all of her brothers married.

Ms. Stockton is the only surviving member of her family. "Mattie Lou died about 1982, Lillian about 1985 and Beryl in 1988."

She has remained active since she retired in 1970 and

denies ever having any major health problems. "I do this and that and run around a lot. I go down to the house on the old home place by the lake once or twice a week. I used to spend nights there some, and my sister and I would spend summers there. I attend a lot of activities at the First Methodist Church. I play bridge and rook at people's homes, and I used to be in a book club but we discontinued it because there weren't but four of us living." She admits to having somebody that works in the house and yard, but "I help them."

At the pace this ninety-three year old lady keeps, she may just be getting started.

After our final recording session, we went for a drive, touring the New Hope and Pleasant Hill areas. She seemed anxious to show me the vicinity and proved to be an excellent guide.

On our way down Route 79, she pointed out several large farms that had been in various families for several generations. Just before Mink Creek, we turned right. After a quarter of a mile or so, we intersected an old, narrow road, the original route to Guntersville that passed near her house when she was growing up. A left turn put us on a dirt road that ended within a few hundred yards at a "No Trespassing" sign. Ms. Stockton pointed out that the New Hope school and church had been located on a flat area just beyond the sign. We then headed east on an unimproved dirt road back to Route 79 and turned south.

Across Mink Creek, we turned right and soon hit the old road again, which passed behind the Gross Cemetery. She

pointed out an old one and a half story house where her mother had grown up, and told me the house was insulated with cotton seed. The store owned by her two uncles had been just across the street from the house. Also, at one time there had been a post office near here in what was called Dodsonville.

Back on 79, we went several hundred yards past the end of the four lane highway and pulled into the driveway of her house on the east side of the road. The house is in a beautiful location, just a hundred feet or so from the backwater of the lake. Several hundred feet away is the ridge they used to canoe to during the winter floods. Just north of the ridge, the backwater passes on to merge with the river, about a mile away. It was hard to imagine that all the space from the house to the river had once been fertile farm land. Gertrude indicated that the house was usually empty, except when used as a guest house, but a preacher is now living in it on a temporary basis until he gets settled.

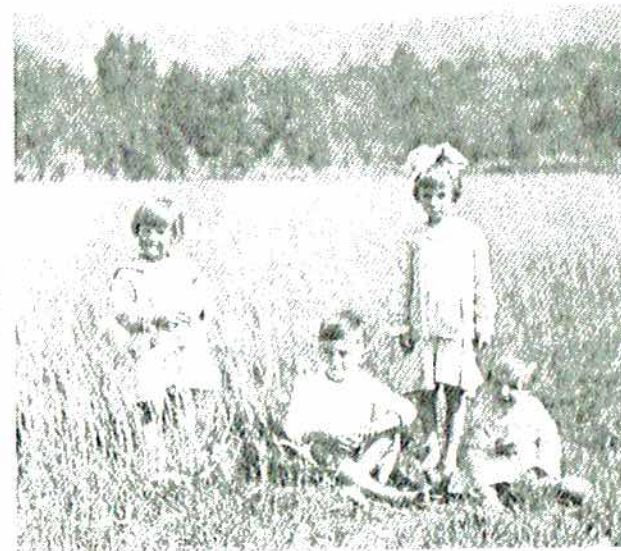
The house was the last stop on our journey, so we returned to Scottsboro. As I walked Ms. Stockton to her door, I knew that I had been fortunate to have the opportunity to meet and visit with such a remarkable lady.

OPAL WRIGHT PETERS

I barely knew Ms. Peters before our taping sessions. I knew that she was a committed, hard working member of the First Methodist Church in Scottsboro and that her cooking, and particularly her rolls, were legendary around town. I also knew that she had been a nurse for a local family doctor for many years. But we had never actually spent any time together.

She seemed agreeable to cooperate with me on my project, but reached a brief impasse about a time for me to come calling at her house. The reason was that she was busy in some activity the first couple of dates I suggested, which was pretty impressive for an eighty-seven year old lady. Finally, I hit on a day and time when she wasn't otherwise engaged.

She lives in a pleasant house on a pleasant street in



*From left to right:
Opal, Lindsey,
Rachel, and
Inez Wright*

Scottsboro. The house is relatively modest with a well-kept yard. I knocked on the front door several times and got no response. Finally, I went through the carport to a side door. She saw me and let me in, explaining that she never ever used the front entrance. I was struck by her youthful appearance-she looked much younger than her age. She held her body straight, and her gait was sure.

Before we settled down for our first session, she insisted on showing me around her house. She took great pride in all the furniture, mostly oak, that she had recently stripped down and refinished. She was also in the process of putting a bottom on one of her chairs. Meanwhile, I was thinking, "How many other ladies this age, or any other age, do this sort of thing?"

*Eventually, we got around to the purpose of my visit, and she was an enthusiastic participant in providing her life story. Before we began, however, she proudly showed me a book to which she contributed (*Healing Hands: An Alabama Medical Mosaic*, by J. Mack Lofton, Jr., published in 1995 by the University of Alabama Press). In this book, the author presented first person recollections of many facets of medical practice in the state. Opal's tales of her days as a nurse are in two sections of the book, and she even allowed me to borrow this prized possession.*

Opal seemed to enjoy telling about her adventures with Dr. Hodges as well as reliving other aspects of her life.

On January 6, 1909, in the Aspel community in southwestern Jackson County, Alabama, a young couple in their

early twenties climbed into a buggy and headed toward the school in Aspel. The young man was Elmer Lindsay Wright of Aspel, and the young woman was Mary Phemilia Watson of Lim Rock. Their mission that day, though, was not to attend classes. The school was located in a church, and the principal was also a preacher, and he married Elmer and Phemilia as they sat in the buggy under a big oak tree in the front of the building. Following the ceremony, the newlyweds celebrated their honeymoon by returning to the Wright home place in Aspel and killing hogs. Four years later, on the nineteenth of May, 1913, their third child Opal was born.

The Wrights, along with the Browns and Smiths, were the original members of the Aspel community. The Wrights had been farmers in the community for many years, going all the way back to Opal's great-grandfather William Calvin Wright, who bought 320 acres at a public auction in 1867 for \$650. William and his wife Angaline had three children-William Minus, Laurel and James Buchanan (Opal's grandfather). In 1874, William Calvin Wright and Angaline deeded 120 acres to his son James Buchanan Wright. He also gave about 200 acres to his other son William Minus Wright. James Buchanan bought Minus's land in 1883 and added other smaller parcels over the years. His farm eventually encompassed approximately 400 acres, which remained intact until highway US 72 divided it into northern and southern portions. The north side is all that remains in the family-Opal's granddaughter Marie Saint owns it.

James Buchanan married Belle Lindsay, and they had four sons and three daughters. Alton died young from a bee sting. The other boys were Oakland, Barton and Elmer Lindsay,

Opal's father. Two of the girls, Effie and Jimmie, married Walls brothers. Mabel married Sanford Lee from Grant, and he drowned in the great Mississippi floods in the nineteen twenties. Mabel had three children, two girls and one boy. "The girls had tragic deaths, one burned and one got food poisoning. Her son, Sanford, Jr., had a big carpet factory in Oklahoma."

Opal's mother was called Mary Phemilia Watson and Mary Watson and Mamie Watson. "Her name was Mary really, but my grandmother's name was Mary, and to distinguish her from my grandmother, she was called Mamie until she died." She was from Cherokee County. Her parents were Moses H. Watson and Mary Phemilia Livingston. "I think my mother's daddy and mother met over there, and eventually moved to Jackson County. They lived on the Gentle farm for eighteen years, and then he bought a farm in Lim Rock. She was living in Lim Rock when she and my father married." Mary had a "bunch" of brothers and sisters including Viola, Ella, Mabel, Bertie, Tom, Milt, Mose (who died in World War II and is buried in France), Luther, James, and Brian. Opal's grandfather Watson owned a farm in Lim Rock but later bought a large farm in Mississippi.

Opal was one of eight siblings. The oldest was Adril Lindsay, born October 25, 1909. Next came Ella Rachel, who was born June 27, 1911. Opal was the third. Mabel Inez was born on September 3, 1914, followed by Harris Buchanan in 1916 and Mary Belle in 1917. On October 25, 1919, exactly ten years after the oldest was born, Joyce Love came along, but she died after eighteen months. Milton Alston, the youngest, was born in 1921. All but one were delivered

at home by a Dr. Gaddis, who lived in Aspel. The exception was Joyce Love, who was born at home under the care of Dr. Rayford Hodges from Scottsboro.

Opal's father, Elmer Lindsay, continued the family tradition of farming, although he rented out some of the land, and he farmed all his life. "He raised corn, cotton, beans, cattle and cane to make molasses. We took the corn to the grist mill in Aspel on the Smith place to be ground." Opal remembers her father as being more "easygoing than mother. He wasn't too tall, and he never did get too heavy, he had a good figure. He worked hard but never went and sat on his plow and waited for daylight like some of his neighbors did. He said that was crazy, and that if he couldn't make a living from sunup to sundown he was just through. He would come home for lunch, mother always had a big meal, which we called dinner then. He would sit down and eat his meal, then lay down in the hall and take him a nap on the cool floor, like an old dog.

When the sun went down, my dad came home and put his mules in the barn. He raised some mules, and plowed with mules, but he always kept a good riding horse." He was an avid fox hunter. "My daddy and Mr. Evans and John Word spent many an hour on that ridge hunting foxes with their dogs. Each one claimed they knew which dog was ahead, but I don't know if they did."

Her mother was the disciplinarian of the family. "My mother was tall and slender with beautiful auburn hair. She was a pretty woman, a good woman, and a Christian woman. She sewed and made almost all of our clothes. She ran the household while daddy did the farming. Mother had a horn

she used to let daddy know when dinner was ready if he was in the field. It came from a Texas steer, and daddy made the mouthpiece.”

Opal has fond memories of the old home place in Wright’s Cove Hollow, north of Highway 72 (back then, there was no road in that location). The house was on an old dirt road. “The house had two big rooms with a fireplace on each end and a dog track in the middle, but ours was enclosed and made a big hall. One of these rooms was a parlor, and we always had a bed in there for company. It had a big long front porch. There was a narrower back hall with two bedrooms and a dining room and a kitchen opening off that. The kitchen had a fireplace. My mother and daddy had two double beds. The boys had a room and the girls had a room. Of course, the little ones slept in the room with mother and dad. The house was wood and was painted white.”

Since there was no electricity, the fireplaces were the main source of heat, and cooking was done on a wood stove in the kitchen. Kerosene lamps were used at night (“We had to study by those kerosene lamps.”). “It may have been in the forties before we finally got electricity out there, and it came from the power company in Stevenson. My youngest brother, a lineman for the city, wired the house.” Water came from the well, and the toilet was outside. They had no ice box, and milk was hung in a bucket in the well. Meat was preserved by curing. “We didn’t have grass in the yard, and it was kept swept with a broom.”

In 1929, the old house was torn down and her father built a new house, which is just north of US 72. “The new house had a story and a half, and it is still there and is in good

shape. It is not in the family now, though.”

As could be expected, all the children had chores. “We had to get in enough stove wood to last the next day, and afternoons we would have to bring up water from the well. The girls had to do a lot of baking, and I did a lot of cake baking.” Despite a plethora of chores, however, there was plenty of time to have fun. “We made our own playing. The land sloped some, and my Uncle Jim, who was kind of crippled, gave us a wagon after he quit working in a casket factory in Chattanooga. It had big iron wheels, kind of like a two-horse wagon but small. And we would get in the back of that wagon and ride down the hill and then we would pull the wagon back up and ride again. And we would cut off a cedar tree and leave a post and drill a hole in a plank and set it on that post and then go round and round. And we would get into the top of trees in the pasture that would bend and ride them down. We would jump out of the loft in the barn onto hay, and crazy things like that, but we only had one broken arm in the whole bunch. We were lucky. We did have our work to do, but we had our fun.” Her playmates were mostly her siblings—the nearest neighbor was over a quarter of a mile away, and most of her cousins did not live in the area.

Opal’s family was largely self-sufficient, did little traveling, and had minimal contact with the rest of the world. “We raised most of what we ate, and canned a lot of it. My dad would buy a barrel of flour at a time for biscuits and pie crusts and cakes and things like that. The Smiths had the only store in the community, it had general merchandise. Bruce had the store, and then Herbert his brother ran it after

Bruce got down into bed for years with TB. Then that store closed and my dad had to go to Lim Rock." Her mother made most of the clothes for the girls, but "with three girls, you could hand down. I never got many new ones. The young ones got more new clothes because the clothes were worn out by the time they got down to them." Items that could not be obtained locally were ordered mostly from Sears or less frequently, National Bellas Hess.

The family had a buggy and a wagon. "We traveled mostly in the buggy, and usually used it to go to church. But sometimes we had to take the wagon because there were so many of us. Later, my daddy owned the only car in the community, a T model Ford. I don't remember the year he got it. But we mostly stayed at home. There was not a road going directly to Scottsboro. First you had to go to Lim Rock along the road about where it is now. Then they put one through Sauty Bottom and on through Woods Cove. I was sixteen before I ever was in Scottsboro. I came with a Derrick family who lived across the ridge from us. We went to a little hamburger joint over there on a fourth of July. We did go to Huntsville about once a year." Their main contact with the world at large came when Opal was a young teenager. "We got one of the first battery radios there was. It had a big cabinet. We would rush to get the water up and the stove wood in and then listen to Sarah and Sally and those kind of crazy talk shows and things. My nephew has the cabinet now and he fixed a radio in it."

Opal now has come to the realization that although "We thought we were poor, we weren't really. We had plenty to eat and plenty to wear. That is the advantage of living on a farm,

raising your food and being frugal. We had a good home life. We didn't really have a rough time during the depression. We had the farm and my daddy had some money, he cashed his all out when the banks went broke and before they closed. My uncle lost his and had to live with us."

Opal's parents were not educated people, but then most were not during that time. "My father's mother would take her children to Nat Academy, what school they had, then he went to school in Pisgah. I don't know how he happened to go there. My mother probably went as far as they taught in Lim Rock. I'm sure neither one of them finished high school." However, they put a premium on their children's education and made certain they attended and did their homework.

Opal started school in the wood frame Methodist Church in Aspel (the same one her parents were married in front of). "I was seven years old when I started, and the school went for about six months during the winter. The school was about a mile from the house, and we had to walk. There were six grades and one teacher, Viola Mae Little from Mississippi, who boarded in the community. We were all in the sanctuary, that's all there was then along with a pulpit and blackboard. There was a big wood stove, but the woods are all but gone now and it is mostly farmland. The classes would all sit in different parts of the room, and there would be some little desks scattered about. The teacher would be with one group while the others were doing their homework. There were maybe forty students in all with about six to eight in each class. I remember that one assignment I had in the first grade was to draw a cow on the blackboard. I also remember that we had the old green primer, and I would love to have one

right now because it would probably be worth a fortune.”

She recalls that going to the bathroom was a memorable experience. “They were outside. The boys went that-a-way and we went this-a-way. The boys went into the woods and the girls went behind the gin at the creek branch. There was no privy, just the edge of the creek. The Smiths owned the gin, it was on their place.”

After the sixth grade she went to Lim Rock School, which was located on a hill near where the Lim Rock Nursery is now. The school was “in a separate building, not a church. My mother made me repeat the sixth grade there because she didn’t think I got enough in Aspel to go to the seventh. Lim Rock was bigger, it had separate rooms and teachers. I think the school year was about six months when I went there. Sometimes some of the older kids drove us to the school. Mr. Kirkpatrick and his wife were teachers there. They were from Princeton, and she is still living in Dalton, Georgia. Eileen Smith Davis and Ada Wann and myself were her former students, and Sam Hambrick had her in Paint Rock Valley. We all went to see her a couple of years ago.”

She attended Lim Rock School for three years, then went to Jackson County High School in Scottsboro for the ninth grade. “We rode the bus. It came from Aspel to Larkinsville and then on to Scottsboro on what is now the Old Larkinsville Road. My brother drove the bus later on. The bus couldn’t get to the house, so my daddy built a garage for it down near the church and he locked it at night. I liked going to school in Scottsboro, but I didn’t have much associations. The reason is that I had to get that bus in order to get home. We didn’t live on a paved road or a gravel road, it was a dirt road

that wandered around into that cove. We had a path on the bench of the road where we wouldn’t get so muddy. We would wear galoshes or old shoes and then change shoes. Sometimes you had to walk along that road and cross the ridge to the house after dark alone, or before daylight to get out to the school bus.”

The need to catch the bus interfered with her social activities at the high school. “I couldn’t join any clubs or anything, so I didn’t fit in real well.” At times, though, the bus was practically a home away from home. “They parked the bus near the square, and those of us that brought lunches went to the bus to eat in it. And when there were ball games, the bus stayed and I sat on the bus sometimes because I didn’t have any money to go to the games.” She did make some friends at school, however, and she has particularly fond memories of Catherine Peters Henshaw and Octavia Bankston.

Her class was scheduled to graduate in 1933, but then the depression hit and the school closed as a public institution after three months. However, the school was open for those who could pay a fee. Her father felt she should wait until the next year, so she finished in 1934. “There were several of us who waited that year. Louis Wheeler, Bill Woodall, Irene Carter Colston, Ruby Roden who is now deceased, Bessie Kate Staton and Octavia Bankston.” All of these have attended the reunions of both classes through the years. Overall, Opal looks back rather fondly upon her years at Jackson County High School. “I loved school. I made mostly As and Bs,” but admits “I didn’t study as much as I should have.”

Opal attended the Aspel Methodist Church. Her mother

had belonged to the Missionary Baptist Church in Lim Rock (a Primitive Baptist church and a Methodist church were also in Lim Rock). "My mother was Baptist and raised six Methodists and a Presbyterian." Actually, there were no other churches in Aspel, the nearest being a Church of Christ between Aspel and Lim Rock. The preacher, based in Woodville, had a circuit that included Woodville, Lim Rock, Paint Rock and Aspel. Every fourth Sunday the entire family went to church, and they occasionally visited the Baptist church in Lim Rock. The mother and all the kids attended Sunday School, which was held every Sunday ("We didn't have any choice, but we enjoyed going to church anyway."). She fondly remembers putting a nickel in the collection plate at Sunday School, and "We had a good MYF in later years." She also remembers that the preacher often ate at the Wright house on Sundays. Opal's love for the church, ingrained at an early age, has continued throughout her life. Since moving to Scottsboro, she has belonged to and been very active in the First United Methodist Church. However, she still maintains a strong loyalty to the church in Aspel, and her "little sister, grandfather, great-great grandmother, great-great grandfather, great grandmother, grandmother, father, mother, and some others" are buried in the cemetery there.

Opal lived at home after finishing high school in 1934. She worked in the farm office in Scottsboro, which was located in the lot that has been cleared across from the post office. Her youngest sister developed osteomyelitis and was treated by Doctor S. P. Hall, the family's physician in Scottsboro. She had surgery, and Opal nursed her during the

prolonged course of the disease. She obviously impressed Dr. Hall with her nursing skills, for "He told me that my calling was as a nurse, and that he could get me into the nurse training program at Erlanger Hospital in Chattanooga, and he did in 1938." She finished her freshman year at nursing school, but she had developed a heart problem. "Dr. Livingston, the heart specialist there, took an EKG and told me that I could not take the stress and strain of nursing, and I still have the letters that he wrote to my mother and daddy. So that is why I didn't finish nursing school. He told me to come home and rest." So she did and resumed taking care of her sister after she had further surgery.

Her nursing training was not wasted, however. "Dr. Julian Hodges in Scottsboro needed a nurse. He knew I had that year of training, and I had been recommended to him as someone who would be good help. On Sunday, the twenty-third of November, 1941, he had to come down to our community to see a man with pneumonia, so he said I will pick you up. So we made the arrangements, and he wanted me to live with him and Ruby, his wife, and I did even until after I married. He lived in the same two-story house on Hodges Street that Ruby lives in now. I believe they built that house and moved in December 21 the year before I went to work for him. Their oldest daughter Janice was in kindergarten and the youngest daughter Karen was three when I moved in with the family." Opal had found her calling, and she continued to work for Dr. Hodges for fifty-three years, until 1994.

She was Dr. Julian's Girl Friday. "I helped him with all the patients and did all the books. I swept the floors and cleaned the office, which was upstairs in the Proctor Build-

ing, over there on the east side of the square. Dr. Lynch's office was where Charles Dawson's office is now. The Post Office was downstairs in the Proctor Building, and Reid Sundries was there, too. Word Motor Company was also in that area." Dr. Hodges's office remained in that location until 1949.

Meanwhile, on September 29, 1945, Opal's life took on a new dimension-she got married to Robert Edward Peters. A brother called him Dick, and he was called that the rest of his life. "I was thirty two and he was thirty one. We dated fifteen years, one month, and ten days. I met him in Woodville. I was down there visiting a distant cousin. He had a cousin, too, and we were going to spend the night with his cousin. They were having a revival at the Methodist church in Woodville, and we had to walk around the edge of a mountain to get there. They wanted a boy to walk with them, and he did, and he just wanted to walk with me. I was 16 and he was 15. Next morning, as we were going back to Woodville where my cousin lived, he was standing on the porch to walk with us. After I went home, I got a letter from him, and that is how it started.

"He didn't have a car. We double-dated with a man who did have a car, he was from Woodville and dated a girl from Aspel. Later, Dick did get a car. He had a sister who lived in Clovis, New Mexico, and he went out there and finished the last year of high school. From there he went to Chicago and went to work for New York Life Insurance. Then he transferred to Birmingham to be closer to home, but he hurt his back lifting a desk, so he went back to Chicago to have back

surgery. This was while we were still dating, and we kept in touch. Then he came home and sold insurance around here, you know people didn't buy insurance much back then, and it was a hard go. And then he raised some chickens, and we got married and he went to work for the state highway department. He worked with them for twenty-one years.

"We first lived with one of his aunts for a while, then we lived in a little cottage that Lawton Kennamer had dragged back behind his garage. We rented it, and it had a bedroom, living room and kitchen. When my brother went to the Korean War, we moved out to Five Points into his house, and after that we moved back to the little cottage for a while. Then his aunt, who was old, wanted us to come over there and live with her on Appletree Street. About a year later she had a stroke and passed away. She left the property to Dick, she had left it to him before we moved in, he was her favorite. She said he was the only nephew she had who also had time to come and see her when he came home to see his parents. We sold that house in 1957 and bought this one on Lora Street."

Mr. Peters had a massive stroke on May 28, 1972, and was an invalid for fourteen years. Opal took care of him and worked when she could. He died April 3, 1986. They had one child, Robert Mack Peters, born December 28, 1954. He graduated from school in Scottsboro and attended the University of Alabama. He has been very successful in the furniture business, with Sofa Connection stores and furniture outlets in Nashville, Franklin and Murphreesboro, Tennessee, as well as in Las Vegas, Tampa, Sarasota, and North Carolina. He has a daughter and a son, fifteen and thirteen.

Mr. and Mrs. Peters also raised her sister Inez's daughter, Martha Lynn Hooper, who is forty nine. "My sister Inez died in 1962 when Martha Lynn was ten years old. She left me a note wanting me to take her and raise her because she knew she would be raised in the church. We raised her just like she was ours and sent her to college at Florence State. She got a masters at the University of Alabama and lacks just a little getting her doctorate. She taught special education in the Alabama school system for twenty-six years. She is retired from that and now teaches in Tennessee."

Opal continued to work with Dr. Hodges while raising her family. In 1949, he moved his office from the square. "He bought the old Daniel home at 108 South Houston over there on the corner of Laurel. H & H pharmacy used to be on that corner, and H. O. Bynum had the big mule farm right down from it. Dr. Julian remodelled the house so Dr. Carl Collins would have a place to come. Then he built the Hodges-Jones Clinic in 1967 for Janice and Grady to come to. Dr. Collins bought the clinic at South Houston and stayed there. Then after Dr. Collins moved, he sold the building back to Dr. Julian, and it became a residence. After Dr. Collins came, I became the office manager and paid all the bills and kept the books but didn't do much nursing."

However, Opal has fond and vivid memories of her years as a nurse, particularly the house calls she made with Dr. Julian, and she relished recalling these memories. "I went with Dr. Julian on his house calls, not regular house calls but to deliver babies. I helped him deliver maybe a thousand babies. I gave the chloroform to the mother and cleaned the

baby up and dressed it and gave it back to the mother. He went all over the county, to Woodville, Skyline, Sand Mountain. He had a Chevrolet coupe at one time, but he had several different cars. I would drive a lot at night, and he would sleep or sing. He had a beautiful voice, and I can still hear him sing 'Sweet Mystery of Life'. I went with him after I got married, too. When he called me at night, he would always tell me to make sure I left a note for Dick so he wouldn't wake up at night and you not at home, it would worry him.

"Sometimes during the war we had three deliveries at night. One time we had four. We only lost one baby that we ever delivered. That was in Woodville. Things usually went well and we never lost a mother, but we did have some forceps deliveries. They were mostly good old strong hard working country women and they ate good and didn't dissipate and drink and smoke, not like they do now. They paid Dr. Hodges maybe twenty five dollars for a regular delivery and thirty five for a forceps. They didn't pay me anything. During the war people paid in money, they had money then. From some we never got anything. I only helped him deliver on house calls, not in the old Hodges Hospital."

Opal's memories of her adventures with Dr. Hodges would fill a book. The following are probably representative: "We went up to Maynard's Cove way over there against the mountain. We had to cross Ivy Bottom and it was full of water. They met us in a wagon, and we got in the wagon to go across the backwater, and I was praying that we got there. The family lived in a little log house or something. Dr. Hodges examined her and said, 'Lady, you are not in labor, you are not any more in labor than I am'. He asked her when she was

expecting, and she said she didn't know but thought she got that way about tater-digging time. He told her she wasn't gonna have a baby anytime soon and to just go on living. So we went back across that water, and I thought that wagon bed is gonna float off and I'm gonna be left in Ivy Bottom and I can't swim a lick. Then another time we went up into Paint Rock Valley, we went as far as we could in the car, then we got out and paddled a boat across the river, and then walked a mile."

Opal has an extraordinary respect for Dr. Hodges. "He was always such a gentleman, and he never introduced me as working for him, I worked with him. He had a pleasant nature with me. I worked with him all those years and he never balled me out one time. Grumpiness could be his facade. If you thought he was grumpy, you should have seen his brother." She continued to help with the payroll in the Hodges-Jones Clinic until 1994, when she was over eighty years old.

Opal's mother died on July of 1970, and her father died on Christmas day in 1971. Her oldest brother Adril Lindsay (the bus driver) was valedictorian of his class, graduated from Auburn, and became a mathematician and teacher. He was also state commander for the VFW. Ella Rachel married Dave Bynum at eighteen and had three girls. They lived in Boston, and she died in 1988. Mabel Inez died in 1962 (Martha Lynn was her daughter). Harry Buchanan farmed all his life and died 31 March of 2000. "He was the oldest man in the Aspel community, and he lived on the Wright farm all his life. He bought twenty three acres off my daddy." Mary Belle Tho-

mas died in January of 2000. "She was a housewife and gave a tenth of her estate to the Methodist Church." Milton Alston, the youngest, was a lineman for the city of Scottsboro. He died in 1972. Opal is the only survivor.

Opal says she has always been in "wonderful" health. An accident in 1998, however, disrupted her life and threatened her independence. "I slipped on some water that was on the floor in the kitchen and fell and messed up my right shoulder. My son came and I went to Tennessee and stayed with him for two weeks. Then I went into assisted living in Scottsboro for two months. After that, I went into Parks Place which is an independent living complex in Hendersonville, Tennessee. I stayed there for two months until I got to where I could use my arm pretty good and could drive. One Sunday I called my son up and he came over and I said I'm going home, and he said what brought that up, and I said I don't need to be here wasting my money, eating two meals a day and nothing else to do. I had no outside activities, I couldn't drive much because I hadn't done much driving in a big city, and I couldn't get to church, and I couldn't get to shopping, and I couldn't do anything. He said if that is what you want you can go home. I hadn't sold my house, so we moved back." Her argument must have been persuasive, because she has lived in her house on Lora Street ever since.

Needless to say, she resumed her activities upon her return and hasn't slowed down since. She is still an ardent churchgoer (First United Methodist Church in Scottsboro) and was on the kitchen crew until recently, and she is a member of a church circle. She helps deliver meals to the elderly

and infirmed (“I help deliver, but I don’t drive. I know the routes.”). She continues to reseat chairs, refinish furniture, and do some carpentry work. Opal also plays rook on a regular basis. She does admit that “My son wants me to slow down on my driving, and I am.” For her to slow down, however, means that she will probably be just as active as most people thirty years younger.

Opal requested the following as her coda: “I have had eighty-seven years, have enjoyed life and have had a happy life and been loved and hope that I have given a lot. The thirteenth verse in the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians says, ‘There are three things, faith, hope and love, and the greatest of these is love,’ and this is certainly true, for you have to love to be loved.”

I had a total of three sessions with Mr. Peters. Before each, she would show me what she had been doing to keep busy. Once, she had just finished cooking a cake (“I’ve cooked several things lately, there’ve been several funerals. No one has just died, but I like to have something on hand just in case.”). On another occasion, she was anxious to show me a wooden window treatment she had cut out with a saw, nailed together, painted, and placed at the top of the window.

After a couple of sessions, we got into my pickup and “did” Aspel, which is about six miles or so west of Scottsboro on US highway 72. Actually, the highway splits Aspel into northern and southern portions, at least what remains of the community. There are a few houses, and an Aspel Methodist Church is still there (the old wood building has been replaced by a

brick structure). No stores are in the immediate area. The church was locked, but she took me back to the graveyard and pointed out the graves and markings of all her relatives and other prominent members of the community. She then attempted to find the dirt road just north of 72 that led to the old family home, which was destroyed many years ago. There was no trace of the road, even though she remembered exactly where it had been. She did show me the house that her father built when she was sixteen—it is on a side road north of the main highway and is a modest wood frame structure that appeared rather small to house her large family. This house is no longer in the family. Opal’s main disappointment with our foray was our failure to see the inside of the church, and she promised to take me back there later on.

When I took a rough copy of my draft for her to correct, I could tell she was excited about something, and she soon told me why. “Saturday I am going with my daughter and her friend to Gunter’sville State Park to hear the talk and see the eagles. They will pick me up at four thirty that morning so we can be there at daybreak. I try to do this every year.” She further related how the guide at the park was so concerned when she missed going the year she lived in Tennessee. In fact, it just about wore me out just contemplating all the activities of this eighty-seven year old lady.

Note: In early 2002, Mrs. Peters moved back to a retirement home in Tennessee and her house is now for sale.



Left: Opal and Robert's wedding day, 29 September 1945

Below: front row, left to right, Inez, Mr. Wright, Mrs. Wright, Mary Belle, Rachel. Back row, left to right, Opal, Lindsay, Harris, Alston



Opal in 1998

IDA MILLER OLINGER

I had known Ida Miller Olinger for several years before I interviewed her, so I did not need an intermediary to set up our meetings. Of course, as with many others in town, my acquaintance with her was through her sewing.

Mrs. Olinger lives in a modest wood frame house on an older street with similar domiciles. On the porch are various handcrafted objects that I later found out that she makes herself. She is a relatively tiny woman, quite thin, and is tooth-challenged. She has bright eyes and a frequent, cackle-like laugh. Her sense of humor is acute, and she loves to be kidded, particularly when asked if she is harboring any old men in her house.



*Back, left to right:
Ida and Ada.
Front, left to right:
Richard and Grady*

I was amazed the first time I took a pair of pants to be hemmed—I wasn't sure how she would be able to pin up the trouser legs. I kept looking for a stool to stand on but was unsuccessful. The amazing part was that this lady in her late eighties at the time nonchalantly sat down on the floor, stretched her legs out, and leaned over and down to eyeball the bottom of the pants. How, I wondered could someone her age show such agility? Then, after she was finished, she hopped right up without any problem. Most people many decades younger could not do this. Now, several years later, she still does the same maneuvers when I take something by.

Mrs. Olinger professed not to “know nothing” when I asked if I could talk to her about her early years. She readily acceded to my request, however. I'm delighted she did because her impoverishment growing up was extreme even for a rural area not known for its wealth.

Ida Miller Olinger was born October 31, 1910, on Gunter's Mountain in Marshall County, just south of Jackson County. Her father was John Miller, a farmer, and her mother was Patsy McClain Miller. “I was very small, real young, when we moved to Jackson County, and I don't remember anything about Gunter's Mountain.”

The family moved to the Aspel area in Jackson County, and this is the first, albeit minimal, memory of place that she has. As she says, “We didn't live in Aspel, we lived in Guffey Hollow. From the church in Aspel, if you come towards Scottsboro, just before you get to the creek there, turn right on the road that cuts over to the Guntersville highway. It

wasn't on the cut-through road, but way back in the hollow.

"I went to the school in Aspel just for the first grade, and I remember ringing the school bell. I was a twin and they was excited about having twins in the school and pulling the rope to ring the bell. I guess I just went there through the first grade."

Her father, John Miller, was a sharecropper and "never owned a farm or a house. He just farmed for anybody he could. I reckon he gave part of what he grew to the owner. My dad raised cotton, corn, hay, stuff like that. He worked at sawmills a lot, too. He just rented them houses from them farmers, and he moved from here to yonder." The next "yonder" place they moved to was Temperance Hill in the Goose Pond area. "I don't know where it got that name Temperance Hill, but it was also called Bunker Hill and Huckleberry Hill. It was near where that trucking place is now. It was all farm country back then. We then moved to Oak Grove just this side of Goose Pond, and lived there for a long time. I grewed up there."

There were a lot of Millers to move around. "There were eight girls and four boys. I was the seventh, in the middle. My mother had a set of twins, her first babies. One of them, Annie, died at birth. The one that lived was Mary. My oldest brother was Henry. Then Veda, Addie, my twin sister Ada and me, Nannie, Katie, Jessie, Richard and Grady. There was about two or three years between us. My mother had babies for a long time."

She remembers her father as a "good man. He was about average size, and like other men, he liked his drinking a little. He was part Indian since my grandmother on his side was a

full-blooded Indian. She looked different from the rest of the family. I didn't know my grandparents on my daddy's side too much, but Lord he had a flock of brothers and sisters. Most of them settled in this area."

Her father was "strict on all the other children but not on my twin sister and me. He would not make us do nothing. I remember the rest of them going to the field and her and me playing in the middle. The middle was between the rows of crops. I think the reason he did that was their first babies were twins, and they lost one of them, and then they had another set, and they wanted to raise both of us. They never told me that, but that is just what I have figured out in life."

Her mother was "a heavy-set woman, a nice woman, and a worker. She loved all us kids. She didn't have to discipline us much, we minded her anyway. We knowed we had to. I knew my grandparents on her side, I knew them well. He came from Gunter's Mountain, there were a lot of them there. When he died, my grandma came and lived with her children. She had four girls, but she lived with us the most. She had one son, but he died young."

In Oak Grove, the family lived on the "Finney place," where her father was a sharecropper. Unfortunately for his large family, Mr. Miller died at the age of forty-two with pleurisy when Ida was "eight to ten years old." Life had never been easy for them, and it only got harder after he died. Mr. Kinney apparently felt for his tenants. "He helped keep us up, he helped us with the groceries. He seen that from month to month that we had what we needed. A lot of time he would order a great big sack of flour for us. (Not only was

Mr. Finney the Miller's benefactor, his son John married one of Ida's younger sisters.) But still we couldn't eat biscuits every morning, we would wait and eat them on Sunday. My older brother was old enough to help, so he and momma kind of kept the family farm going. She raised hogs and we had cows and we had our own meat and milk and butter. We had chickens and eggs, and we just ate what we could get. We raised most of our food. We put in an early garden, I mean real early, in March, and when it begin to come in, we begin to eat.

"We didn't have an icebox. We cured the hams and the middlings and ham and bacon and gravy. We canned everything we could, picked blackberries, Lord I picked oodles of blackberries when I was growing up, and we made jelly and jam. Momma took in washing and ironing but she didn't have time to take in sewing."

The family had almost no income. "We didn't have no money to buy nothing with. There wasn't no social security or stuff like that. There was almost no money coming in. We mostly didn't know what money was until we was grown. There was a country store down there around Goose Pond, we walked down there, we had no other way to get there. At the store we got the necessities with the eggs we took and with what money momma made with washing and ironing. We also ordered from some company, I don't remember what it was, but they would mail it to us in barrels, and we had a rolling store that we met once in a while. But we didn't go hungry, and we didn't go naked, but I don't know who made us clothes."

Despite the hardships, though, Ida Olinger is not bitter about this trying period in her life. "We had a rough time

but we was happy. We didn't know anything else but to be happy. We may not have had much money, we didn't need it because momma kept us going." She now realizes that most others in that area may not have been very different from her family. "Every body else around was in the same boat. Some of them thought they had something, but they didn't. I found out they didn't have any more than I had." Even the sleeping arrangements in the small house seem to be pleasant memories, though "I have slept with as many as three or more in regular sized beds."

Perhaps one reason her memories from this period are relatively pleasant is the way their mother and siblings treated Ida and her twin sister, Ada. "They was just like my daddy was. I didn't have to do many household chores until I was fifteen years old. To tell the truth, I didn't know how to wring anything out of the washtub. I didn't know how to cook and I didn't know how to wash. My chores were anything that I wanted to do that I didn't have to do. I did tote in firewood, I loved to tote it in. My other brothers and sisters did not get jealous, they just petted us all the way through."

The Miller children may not have had much in the way of material possessions but found various ways to entertain themselves. "There were twelve of us, and we made our own games, playing ball, doing things together, we was happy. We would go to the woods and bend over young hickory trees and one would hold it down and the other would get in and then the one holding it down would turn it loose and let it ride up." But apparently most of the playing was with their own siblings. "A right smart number of people lived down in

the area, but I didn't have too many friends growing up. There wasn't too many people that was friendly. They thought we was poorer than they were. They didn't have much to do with us, but we didn't care because we had our own pretties. I didn't have boyfriends coming along, either. Good Lord, them boys didn't mean nothing to me. No, I didn't care nothing about them boys. I never dated but two men in my life, and that was Joe Word and the man I married.

"We didn't go much. We lived pretty much tight. The only place to go was the country store. I didn't know there was a town for years. We had a horse, a wagon and a buggy, that is how we got around from place to place." Even contact with the world at large was limited. "Really and truly, I was probably grown before I heard a talking radio."

Ida went to school in Aspel in the first grade, then attended the Temperance Hill school. "We just went in the winter and out in the summer. There were several teachers and some classes were together. I liked school okay and I did okay. I quit after the sixth grade, I guess because I thought I was too old to go to school. A lot of kids didn't go further than that. They didn't make us go to school back then. If they had, we would have had to went."

Like most other families, the Millers attended church on Sundays. "We went to church at Oak Grove. I don't remember whether it was a methodist or baptist. We had Sunday School every Sunday and had church most of the time, and revivals, too. My momma seen that we went to church, and I enjoyed going."

Two things happened when Ida was fifteen or sixteen that

played important roles the remainder of her life. First, she started going with the man she would marry. Second she learned how to sew. As she says about the latter, "I have been sewing ever since. I had nobody to show me nothing. I learned it all by myself. I was not taking sewing in then, I just sewed for myself and my family." Only later did she begin to sew for others.

She did get a job outside the house when she was seventeen or eighteen. "I worked at Claude Spivey's hosiery mill. I don't remember how much I got paid. But back then they didn't pay much. I didn't work at Spivey's too long."

She was twenty-two years old when she married Gordon Olinger. "He was from Goose Pond; I went to school with him. We got married seven years after we started going together. I was twenty-two when we got married. I don't remember when he proposed. Gordon didn't do anything except help his daddy on the farm until we got married, then he went to work at Shook's Laundry on Houston Street. He was a presser, and he worked there a long time. After we got married, we stayed here with my momma for a while, then we moved over here on Broad Street two or three houses down from Abercrombie's car place. We lived there two or three years, but I've lived everywhere, I've lived over the laundry, I've lived all over this town. We always rented until we bought this house in 1955."

In 1933, after having been married about a year, she had her first child, Glenda. Her next child, Patsy, was born in 1940, but, "I lost one in between."

Mrs. Olinger went to work at Benham's "down there on the railroad under the hill" not long after Glenda was born.

"I got paid seventy five cents an hour until I asked for a raise. I started out as repair girl. Benhams made men's undershorts. Different machines made different parts of the shorts, then the workers put them together as the parts came down the line. Then the inspectors got ahold of them and if there was anything wrong, they sent them down to me and my girls to mend them. After that, I went to supervising the rest of the time I was there, which was most of the time I worked there.

"I supervised about twenty, I guess, I had a pretty important job. And I had to teach them how to sew when they came through the door. We didn't have a night shift, they weren't set up to have one. The girls would have a bundle of work started and when night come she had no place to store it until the next morning, so it would have been a mess. A shift was eight hours with forty five minutes off for lunch. I worked there for thirty five years, it was hard labor."

She started sewing for other people while she worked at Benham's. "I had been working there a while before I started taking sewing in. The girls at the mill would want me to bring something home and make it for them. I did show them how to sew a zipper in at the mill, they couldn't do that. But I didn't do that during work time." Mrs. Olinger is now ninety one years old, and she still has a steady stream of customers bringing clothes by her house to be altered.

Mrs. Olinger only has one surviving sibling, a younger sister, Katie Harden, who lives on Cumberland Mountain and has "heart trouble and strokes." Her mother died in 1970 at age eighty eight. During her later years she lived with one of her sons on Cumberland Mountain. Except for one brother

who died in Indiana, all of the Miller siblings lived in this general area.

Gordon Olinger, her husband, died over ten years ago. "He had all kinds of problems and hadn't been able to work for a while. He had a heart attack." Her older daughter, Glenda, married a Whitten and lives in Henagar. She has six children. Patsy, the younger daughter, married Jerry Brown and has a boy and a girl. They live in Scottsboro.

She still enjoys her sewing and, as indicated earlier, plans to quit the first of the year (January 2002). However, she admits that she threatened to quit last year, but didn't, and "may never, but I'm working on quitting, though." She says she "watches television all the time and enjoys going when someone takes me."

Mrs. Olinger is baffled about her longevity. "None of my family lived as long as I have. I've always been in good health without any serious health problems. I did have some surgery, I had what they call a hysterectomy, appendicitis, things like that. But I never smoked, I never drank, and I always worked hard."

She does tend to be somewhat philosophical when comparing olden and modern times. "A lot of water has been over the dam since I was growing up. Nobody then had a lot, there wasn't a whole lot to be had. There was some who thought they was rich, but if you shelled it down to the cob, they wasn't. But kids are different now, they have more and expect a handout." Of course, her grandkids do not fit into that category. "My grandkids would do anything for me. One of them told his boss that 'if my granny calls me that she needs me, I'm going.'"

Does anybody care to bet that this remarkable senior citizen will quit sewing anytime soon?

Soon after our last taping session, Mrs. Olinger and I went for a drive. She met me outside her house, ready to go, wearing a small hat, black pants with a prominent sheen and a light colored blouse. She very agilely climbed into my pickup and off we went.

We headed west on US 72, crossed the causeway, and turned left on county road 114 "the cut-through road to Guntersville." After less than a mile, we turned right on county road 537, which was blocked off by a metal gate about a quarter of a mile past the turnoff. Had the road continued, it would have proceeded between two high hills into Guffey Hollow. And deep in this hollow is where the Millers lived when they first moved to Jackson County when little Ida was about six years old.

Her memories of their short stay there are sketchy, but she recalled the following fragments while we were in Guffey Hollow. She does remember that she had to walk to school in Aspel on a narrow path that passed high over the hill blocking the western end of the hollow. She also remembers that her mother would place eggs in beds of cotton seed for protection, hitch their mule to the wagon, then go out the eastern exit of the hollow over a bumpy road, and sell the eggs for whatever price she could get.

We then returned to Scottsboro and got on Bob Jones Road, headed south. Approximately one mile north of Hancock Road (the road to the Goosepond industrial complex), she pointed out a white wood-frame house on the left. "This is Mr. Finney's house, it is still standing. It is where my brother-in-law was

raised. (Note-Mr. Finney was the landowner who helped out the Miller family, and his son married Mrs. Olinger's sister). We lived back behind that hill there, and the hickory thicket where we used to ride the trees up was right there by the road."

Further south on Bob Jones we passed the old school where she went from the second through the sixth grade—"There is that trucking company in it now." Just past the school on the left is a small white house on the spot where they first lived when they moved to the area. The house they lived in no longer exists. During our drive in the Bob Jones area, Mrs. Olinger commented that not many people lived down there back then, but of course a lot changes in eighty-five years or so.

Ida Miller Olinger is still going strong, and I can't tell any change since I first met her several years ago. I'm glad, because I occasionally have pants that need to be altered.



Gordon, Ida, and Glenda



Richard, Katie, Nannie, Ida, Ada, and Addie in 1990



Ida in 2000

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