

Iona Hope Branch Gander



Her Favorite Stories

Booklet compiled in 2002 by

Alice Bell Gander

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Introduction

Someone once said:

"When an old person dies, a whole library of history dies with them."

That was the opening line of the Branch Family Story prepared by Jackie Coon Deets in 1986. She had recorded a number of cassette tape conversations with her Mother, Iona Gander between 1972 and 1974. She compiled a booklet of family stories from the conversations she had taped years before. She selected this quote to convey how much history Iona Gander took with her when she died November 12, 1976. Now, as I write this just a few weeks after Jackie's death November 26, 2002, I feel so sad that we have lost another library of history in the family. Jackie treasured her family roots and preserved so much for the next generations. I offer this current effort at preserving history as a tribute to both of these extraordinary women. I loved them both and I mourn their loss. But they are not gone; they are with us yet in voice and in spirit.

The book you are reading now is really over 110 years in the making and is still a work in progress. It is a unique opportunity to hear Iona Branch Gander, in her own words and voice, tell the first-hand account of homesteading in Colorado in 1889. And the exciting trip in the covered wagon from Missouri to Virginia in 1894. She talks to us about her life experiences and about everyday life on the farm. It's a way of life that hardly exists anymore.

I hope this book and the companion CDs will revive cherished memories in those who knew Iona and Jackie and inspire those who never had the opportunity. I realized as I was transcribing the tapes that much of what they discuss would not be understood at all by younger generations who have always lived in the city.

I had the opportunity to grow up near my grandmother Iona Gander and spent many hours learning from her. The stories in this book are familiar to me. I also remember many of the daily activities such as making sauerkraut from scratch.

My own mother made kraut this way when I was young.

I hope all readers will enjoy reading this booklet as much as I have enjoyed preparing it.

Alice Bell Gander

Greer, South Carolina

February, 2002



Jackie Coon Deets at her 90th Birthday Party, January, 2000.



Easter 1961. Iona and Harve Gander with Alice.



Iona was 70 years old when her last grandchild, Alice Bell Gander was born in 1956.



May 1957. Alice on the floor of the kitchen at Harve and Iona Gander's home. She is in front of the sink. The table was by the window.



December 7, 1975. About the last time Alice saw her grandmother. Iona died November 12, 1976.

Alfred Branch Family Story

Written by Jackie Coon Deets

Their story, as told to Jackie Coon Deets by Iona H. Gander. Transcribed from tape recordings made between 1972 and 1974 and written by Jackie Deets in 1986.

Alfred Alexander Branch and Ida Frances Phelps were married in Washington County, Virginia. We have no record of the date or the specific place. They began their life together in a little cabin in Moccasin Gap, Virginia. Mother thought it might have been one of the slave cabins on her Fathers (John Phelps) home place - the place we later came to call "Aunt Phine's place". Iona Hope, Sept. 25th 1885, and Samuel Thomas, were born there. Mother said she assumed that her Father, Alfred Alexander, did some farming, but had no definite information. It was the period of Reconstruction, after the Civil War, and times were lean. Sometime around 1890 [It was April, 1889] they went to Colorado to take up a claim and homestead land. The story of this segment of their life is told separately under the title "Homesteading in Colorado". It is a story of high hopes, courage, hardship and disappointment. (It is my belief that the promoters who got them excited about going West, offered free train transportation. I know of some other instances where this was true. The railroads were expanding in the West and needed the country to be settled up.) After a year of struggle, they returned to Missouri on the train. Fairy Caledonia was only a few months old at the time.

After returning to Missouri from Vilas, Colo. They went up to Shelby County to a place called "Lone Tree", or "Lone House" (on my tapes Mother sometimes called it one thing and then the other). Here they lived and farmed for around two years. Then they moved back to the area South of Warren on the "Rocky Hollow Road".

Here they lived in a little one room log house that lay to the east, around the hill, from the land that later became the "home place". They cooked, ate, slept and everything in that one room. Mother remembered how the house was banked with dirt all around to keep the floor warm. The Whip-Poor-Wills would sit on that bank at night and call. Here William Robert Lee was born.

Alfred Alexander - Ida (my Grandmother) always called him "Allie" - wanted to find land in the Ozarks. Mother said he had an "itchy foot", but then, she said perhaps he was just lonely for mountains. He fitted out a wagon - (Grandmother Ida sewed the canvas) cover - got a team of big bay draft horses, sold his corn crop in the field, and any other assets he might have had to raise cash, loaded his family into the wagon and set out for the Ozarks to find land. This period of their life is recounted separately in Iona's own words in "The Covered Wagon Story".

When they returned to Missouri from that trip, they went back to that same little one room log house, deciding to settle down and get some land in the area. Here, I quote Mother from the tapes: "Before we bought that little home place, Dad went down to Bowling Green to look at some farms he had heard were for sale. He went on the train. I remember Mother going over his clothes and getting him ready. Of course he hadn't had a new suit since he was married. When he got to Bowling Green, he didn't like what he saw. He came back and we took the land for the "home place" on a lease for five years. It belonged to Bill Day. Just land in the rough. Not a thing on it except what Dad put there."

"Dad cut the timber off the place to build the house. First we had just one big room of log. It took 30 yards of rag carpet to cover the floor. There, was a sleeping loft with an open stairway going up to it. When the lease was up, Dad bought the place. We just paid \$100.00 down on it. Dad borrowed the money from the county the interest was 4%. Mother would save up our money little by little, in a box, and once a year we paid on the interest and some on the mortgage." Allie witched a well down the grade below the house and dug a well there. That meant they had to carry their drinking water up the hill to the house, though there were rain barrels to catch rainwater for washing.

Their last child, James Alfred, was born in the new log house. Again, I quote my mother, from the tapes: "The year that Alfred was born, we had just moved into the new house and Dad was clearing some ground for crops. Mother was in bed sick with chills and fever (malaria) and the baby was due. Her fever was running so high she didn't know what was going on. I must have been 11 or 12, but I had done some washing and then I had washed the kitchen windows. I realized it was dinnertime and Dad would be in, wanting his dinner. I fixed up the fire in the cook stove, and said to Fairy, 'set the table'. Fairy said 'no' and started up the open stairway and I went over and pinched her on the leg. She howled like I had murdered her, and just then Dad came in." "Onie pinched me", Fairy howled. Dad got a keen little switch. The house was set 'square to the world' as the older people built their houses. The sun was shining in the door and I was right in front of it. Every time the switch came down, I could see the shadow of it as he aimed at my bare legs. I kept jumping the switch. He never got a lick in, not one! Dad got so tickled he said, "Onie, I can't whip you". That was the only time he, ever tried to whip me, but he did send me away from the table once because I forgot to wash before I set the table. Washing before a meal was a 'thing' in our family. Dad was that particular. If the little ones couldn't wash themselves, he would get them up to the pan and wash them himself. On Sundays, we observed Sunday, even though we did not go to Church on Sunday, when we got up, everyone washed and slicked up and put on clean clothes. Sunday morning breakfast was special. We ate cornbread most of the time, but on Sunday mornings, we had biscuits.

I asked Mother if they ground their own meal. Again, I quote "Yes, we had our corn ground into meal, and when we had a good wheat crop, we would have that ground too. The mill would give us credit for so much flour and we could get it, as we needed it. We had some pretty rough times, especially after Dad died, but even before. A man, if he got fifty cents a day, working out somewhere, was lucky, and with five children to support, that wasn't anything. Of course, things were cheaper. You could buy a pound of coffee for a dime - and a pair of shoes for a dollar or dollar and a half. Just look how much work you would have to do to shoe a family. You had to order the shoes, though. Mail Order companies,

Wards and Sears, were very new then and they did a big business.

Again, I quote from the tapes:

"As time went on, Dad built the log barn, which is still standing today. Then he built the henhouse and the crib, and a porch on the East side. Later, it was screened. Down in the front of the house there used to be big Maple trees. We had a sugar camp there and Dad made our syrup in the spring time."

The children attended the nearest rural school. I am not sure but I believe it was PeeDee School. (one of Mothers teachers was Anna Maria Frances T. Leake, who later married J. B. Sams of Philadelphia. Their only daughter, Sara Frances was a classmate of mine in Philadelphia High School, where we graduated together in 1927. Now, Frances Drebenstedt, she, at this writing still lives on the old J. B. Sams place just out of Philadelphia.) Mother did graduate from 8th grade there, and she thought Sam also graduated. The younger ones did not graduate. Both Mother and Sam learned to read, to write beautifully and to handle figures. Compulsory education was not in effect at that time. The children grew older. They all worked hard. Sam learned to care for stock and work in the fields. Iona and Fairy spent long hot days hoeing corn. Mother said that one time one of the neighbor men came down and saw Mother and Fairy hoeing corn and he said, "You're not afraid of spoiling your lily white hands."

In the wintertime Allie out firewood and hauled it into Monroe City to sell, perhaps for a dollar or dollar and a half a load. My Mother, Iona, remembered how her Mother would listen to hear her husband coming home as the wagon clattered over the rocks of the creek in Rocky Hollow road in the dark winter evening.

It was in February. My Grandfather Allie had arranged to trade a wagonload of wood to a Monroe City photographer in exchange for a family portrait. Grandmother Ida sewed new dresses of plaid gingham for Iona and Fairy, a little suit with ruffled collar for Bill, and a dress with hand crocheted lace on the petticoat for baby Alfred. Grandfather Allie had bought new suits for himself and Sam at a fire sale in Monroe. Their shoes were old, but cleaned.

They went into town in the wagon on a bitter cold day, and directly to the photographer's studio. Here,



The family of Alfred and Ida Branch. Left to right: Ida, Iona, Bill, Fairy, Alfred holding son Alfred, Sam.

the treasured family photograph was made. (I notice that Grandmother Ida did not have a new dress. She was wearing a dress of black merino, which according to Mother, she had made a couple of years before.)

It was only a few weeks later that Grandfather Allie came down with pneumonia. Grandmother Ida tried her poultices - there were no miracle drugs at that time - Alfred Alexander Branch lived just one week. He was 47 years old. He was buried at Andrew Chapel, west of Warren.

Now, the family did face hard times. Sam had to grow up and be a man immediately, and though the mortgage had been whittled down some, taxes, interest and mortgage payment still had to be met. Every bit of extra money went into a little box to save up for that obligation. They were strong and brave and they worked hard.

A couple of years later Iona married. They were young and the marriage didn't last. Iona's son, Herbert Phelps was born in April 1902. Grandmother Ida cared for the child, and Iona went into Monroe to work as a maid. First, she worked for the Jaeger family. She earned about \$3.50 per week. Most of that went back to her. She told me that she kept about a dollar a week for herself.

She was a very beautiful young woman with blue eyes and heavy, dark hair. To earn a little extra, she sold Larkin Products (the Avon of the times) whenever she had a little free time. We know that she did well enough that she earned a desk and a rocking chair as prizes.

When Fairy was old enough, she too went to work away from home. She first worked for the Mike Madden family. They had a dairy farm. When the mortgage was paid off, Sam had the maple trees cut from the sugar camp and hauled to the lumber mill. They built the addition to the house, possibly around 1906 or 1907.

In 1908 Sam and his Mother went back to Virginia on the train. Mother said that while he was there, he became enamored of a lovely young lady, Della Pendleton, whom he later married. They went to live on a farm west of Warren. In 1909 Iona married Harvey S. Gander. They went to live on a little farm in Shelby County, near Leonard. In 1912 they bought the farm in Marion County. Bill married Hazel McKee, I believe in 1916. I do not know where they lived first, but believe they moved to Macomb, Illinois in 1919. Ida Frances Branch died at Iona's home on October 13, 1916. She had been visiting us for a week or so when she came down with uremic poisoning. Though I was only six, I remember it very well. Aunt Fairy was there, and she and Mother were wringing out sheets to make hot packs. The tears were streaming down their faces. Grandmother Ida was only 52. I can remember the black hearse, drawn by a team of black horses, Mother and Fairy both in black with black veiling over their faces. She was buried at Andrew Chapel. In 1917 Alfred enlisted in the army. He was sent to Camp MacArthur in Waco, Texas. Then the great influenza epidemic struck and he was very ill for a long time. He did recover enough to continue in the service. On Armistice Day, November 11, 1918 he was in New York, ready to sail for Europe. After the ravages of the influenza, his health was never strong. He died in Macomb, Illinois in January of 1974. We all loved him.

Fairy married Denton Pendleton, I believe around 1922 or 23. Both of them passed away in 1968 and are also buried at Andrew Chapel.

Dear Uncle Bill died in the spring of 1962, while doing something he loved - fishing. Hazel followed a few years later.

Sam and Della lived on the farm and raised their children. In later years he became an agent for State Farm Insurance Co. I have a very clear memory of a Sunday when we were "spending the day" at Uncle Sam's. Fairy and Denton were there also. Uncle Sam said to Mother: "Onie, I've started selling insurance". He explained it all to her. At a later time when Mother and Fairy were together, Aunt Fairy said to Mother - "Sam must be out of his mind, neglecting his farm to sell insurance. He'll starve." Sam hung on through the great depression. He worked hard, prospered, won many awards and we were all proud of him. For a few winters they came to Tucson and I would see them often. Their 50th wedding anniversary was spent here, and I missed them when they no longer came. They, too, are laid to rest at Andrew Chapel. Iona died on November 12th, 1976 at age 91. Her mind was sharp and inquiring right up until the last, but the body that had worked so hard just finally gave up. Harvey preceded her, having passed away on Jan. 4th, 1968. Both are buried in the Gander plot at St. Jude's in Monroe.



Fairy Branch Pendleton, Iona Branch Gander and Sam Branch in front of Sam's home in Monroe City, MO. Taken about 1967.

Nancy Meredith Branch

The following is an extract from the draft text for the book *Prairie Queens* by Alice B. Gander.

“WHAT ARE YOU CRYING for, Grandma?” the young Iona Branch asked Nancy Meredith Branch. “Are you crying about your boys?” Iona Hope Branch was visiting her Grandmother Nancy Meredith Branch. They lived near each other in Little Moccasin Gap on the south bank of the Clinch Mountains just west of Holston, Virginia. It was early 1889 and Iona was about three and a half years old. Nancy and Nelson Branch lived on a sixteen-acre parcel of land on what was called Poor Valley Knob, or known as just the Knob.

“What are you crying for, Grandma?” What, indeed! Nancy’s sixty-two years had been full of many causes for tears of joy and wails of despair. Nancy Meredith was the second of ten children born to Hugh Meredith and Keziah “Katy” Bell in Pulaski County Virginia, in October 1826. After her mother died during the Civil War, her father Hugh Meredith married his neighbor John Rupe’s widow Melvina Rupe and had eight more children.

Nelson Thomas Branch was born in Chesterfield County, Virginia in October 1820. So far, no proof has been found about who his parents were. By 1844 he was living in Pulaski County, Virginia. He married Eunice Kelly on April 25, 1844 and they had three children, Thomas E., Sarah D “Dolly”, and Mary C “Mollie”. No record has been found about what happened to his wife but she must have died around 1848. On March 11, 1849 he married Nancy Meredith. Their first child George W “Will” was born about the beginning of 1850. They then had Harriet “Hattie” in 1852, James Cyrus “Cy” in 1854, Alfred Alexander “Allie” September 11, 1856, Susan Elizabeth in 1859, Hughy Leo in 1861, Edward Thomas in 1864, a daughter that was stillborn in 1866 and finally Robert Lee Branch in 1869. By the 1860 Census, there was no record of Nelson’s first son Thomas, who would have been 14 years old. Since there is no oral history about this son, it is believed that he must have died as a child sometime in the 1850’s.

Nelson Branch was a founder or iron molder in addition to being a farmer. Nancy was a housewife and could not read or write. But, her granddaughter Iona Branch remembered her as “the nicest little old woman I ever knew.” In the 1850’s Nelson Branch served on the Pulaski County Grand Jury several sessions. He acquired some land, initially buying 8 ¼ acres in 1851 in a partnership with his brother-in-law James P. Curtis, who was married to Nancy’s older sister Lucinda. Nelson bought 35 acres in 1853:

A certain track of land lying in Pulaski on the Fall Branch or branch of New River adjoining the land of said N. T. Branch and containing 35 acres more or less and bounded as follows to wit. Beginning at a big White Oak corner of Saw Mill Tract South of the Saw mill on hill side near a fence and with said fence S 32 West 33 poles to a white Oak and Chestnut Sprout top of the hill on James Meredith’s line and with his line N 45 W 131 poles to a pine near top of a ridge thence N 43 E 45 poles B.O. & B. Oak sapling on big survey line thence S 45 E 92 poles to a black oak and dogwood near a saw mill thence S 43 W 15 poles crossing the saw mill branch to a W. Oak thence S 45 E 33 poles to the beginning.¹

And then he bought out James Curtis’ interest in the 8-¼ acres in 1854. In 1859, he bought an additional 22 ½ acres, bringing his total up to 66 acres. According to the 1860 Census, Nelson Branch owned real estate worth \$1000 and had personal property of \$400. That put his family in the lower middle class economically. Respectable, but not at all rich. There is no record of him owning any slaves in that Census, and since slaves cost about \$1000 each at the time, it is unlikely that he could have afforded any slaves.

¹ Pulaski County Virginia Deed Book 2, Page 587

What Nelson Branch did have, starting in 1858, was unpaid debts. He never got on solid financial footing and the Civil War probably was a factor in that. Although the family history says he served in the Confederate Army for four years, we know from his own pension application that he was not a soldier until the last six months of the war. But that does not mean he was not serving the Confederacy all four years. He was an iron molder and was likely pressed into civilian service even though not officially a soldier. There are documented cases of this happening with some of Nancy Meredith's brothers and cousins who also lived in the area.



The old Pulaski County, Virginia courthouse.

By 1870, Nelson was in serious financial trouble and started trying to find ways to hang on to his farm. He put some property in a trust to help pay some upcoming debts, several of which were owed to his wife's relatives.

Witnesseth, That the said Nelson T. Branch doth grant unto the said Joseph H. Covey the following property to wit: One Bay Mare, One Gray Mare, One two-horse Waggon, one set Harnesses, Nine head of sheep, one sow and nine pigs, two cane mills and one calf in trust to indemnify and save harmless David B. Bill as this security of the said Nelson T. Branch in five several forthcoming bonds, this day executed by the said Branch with the said Bill as his security.²

² Pulaski County Virginia Deed Book 4, Page 516

In 1867 Congress passed a new law that was intended to standardize Bankruptcy procedures. This law was further amended in 1872. Nelson applied for Bankruptcy as a way to get out from under his debts while hanging on to his farm. When Nelson filed for bankruptcy in 1872 he listed his personal property as follows:³

One Milch cow	\$15.00
25 Bushels Corn	12.50
Household & Kitchen furniture	40.00
Mechanic's Tools & Foundry Patterns	20.00
One yoke of Cattle	100.00
One Wagon	35.00
Total	\$222.50

Nelson T Branch

He also listed his 66 2/3 acre farm as valued at \$400.00. His outstanding debts totaled \$931.33 at the time he filed for bankruptcy. This resulted in about four years of court proceedings that ultimately did not save his farm. The final judgment was that there were already a number of liens against his property before the Bankruptcy act and these had priority.

So his farm was taken from him and sold at public auction for \$1010 in 1876. That did not clear enough after expenses to pay his outstanding debts of about \$950.

Nelson and Nancy Meredith Branch moved from Pulaski County to a 16-acre parcel of land called The Knob near Holston in the Moccasin Gap area about 1876. It is not clear what caused the Branch family to move to Washington County, but the Bankruptcy court at the time was in Abingdon. They certainly had a number of occasions to come to Abingdon during the bankruptcy proceedings that went on for

³ National Archives & Records Administration, Philadelphia, PA. Abingdon Division, law of 1867 Bankruptcy Docket and Case file 162.



August, 2000 view of "The Knob" where descendants of Robert Lee Branch still live. This view is from the road below the Branch Cemetery.

several years. It is also likely that Nelson knew some people from the area who had served in the Civil War with him. According to the oral history recalled by Iona Branch, when they moved to Washington County they only had \$200 and one riding mare. In the 1880 Census, they are living in Washington County in the general neighborhood of their daughter Hattie who had married Charles Nunley in 1876.

In any case, the family acquired the deed to this 16-acre parcel of land on September 22, 1900:

Beginning on the top of the Poor Valley Knob at two post oaks, thence N32 W70 poles to a planted rock on the North side of the turnpike road at the foot of a spur of Clinch Mountain, thence S53 W40 poles to a planted rock, thence S32 E59 poles to the top of the Poor Knob, thence N66 E40 poles along said knob to the Beginning.⁴

It appears that Nelson and Nancy Branch may have rented this farm for a period of time before buying it. They were certainly not in a strong financial position when they left Pulaski County. Their daughter Hattie Nunley's farm was just around the corner from this parcel of land.

The Branch boys all had to get out and make their own living. Will worked for the railroad in Abingdon. Ed worked on building bridges across Kentucky and Missouri. Alfred and Leo both homesteaded in Colorado although Alfred only

lasted a year before moving to Missouri. Only the youngest, Robert, stayed in the area and his descendants still own and live on the 16-acre plot on "the Knob".

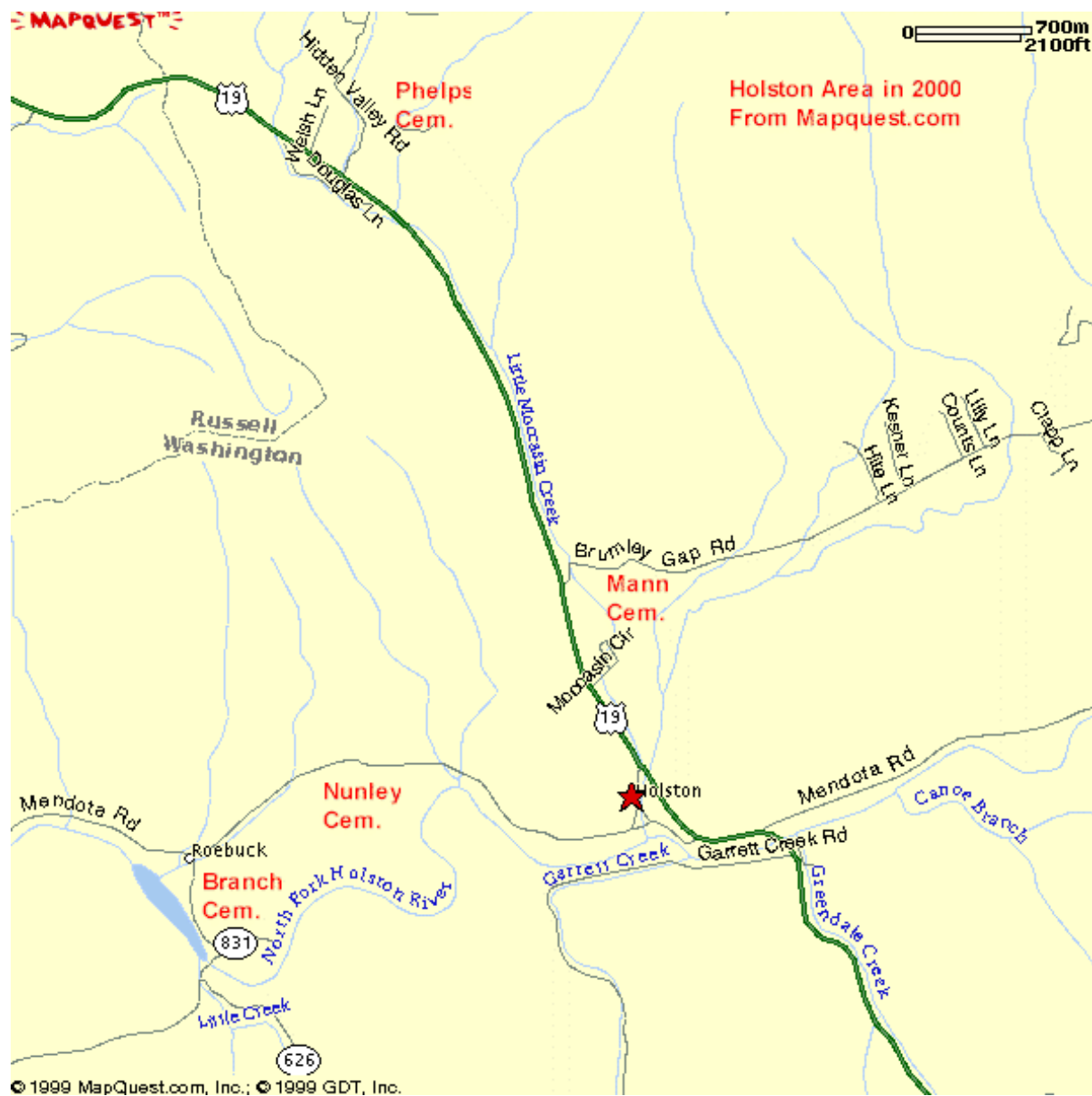
Nelson applied for a Civil War Pension and was awarded \$30 / year. Nancy died sometime between 1900 and 1909. Nelson died in 1909. They are buried in a cemetery across the road from the Charles Nunley house on Mendota Road. There are no tombstones remaining on their graves, if there ever were any.



March, 2001 photo of the Charles Nunley house on Mendota Road. The house was built in 1910 and is now owned by his grandson, Lonnie Nunley, Jr.

⁴ Deed Book 63, Page 340, Washington County, VA

Map of the Holston, Virginia area today.



Ida Frances Phelps Branch

The following is an extract from the draft text for the book *Prairie Queens* by Alice B. Gander.

MOCCASIN GAP is tucked away in the neck of Virginia near Abingdon. It is on the border between Washington and Russell counties in part of the Appalachian Mountains. This beautiful area of rolling green mountains and flowing streams in western Virginia had not been heavily settled at the time of the American Revolution. Large tracts of land here were granted to officers of the Revolutionary Army as military land bounties after the American Revolution. One such tract was:

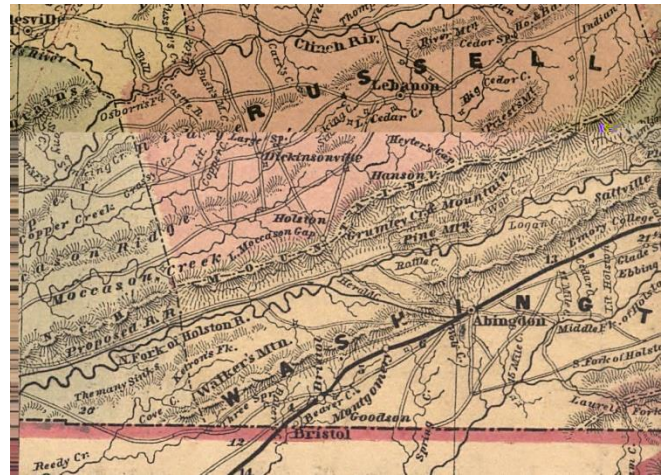
... on the waters of the North Fork of Holstein [sic] River being part of a larger tract containing 23755 acres granted by the Commonwealth of Virginia unto John Fleming by Patent bearing date the ninth day of January 1796 and sold & conveyed by the said John Fleming to the said Alexander Henry and James Boggs by Indenture of bargain and sale bearing date the 18th day of June 1796 and of record also in the said County Court of Washington....⁵

It is not clear which John Fleming is involved here but there were a couple of officers named John Fleming who served in the Revolutionary War. The John Fleming named in this deed acquired over 100,000 acres of land in Washington County at about the same time from a number of Treasury Warrants. The following deed is recording the sale of 25 acres from this larger tract to John Phelps on August 16, 1830:

... bounded as follows, to wit: Beginning at three poplars corner of the land on which John Phelps now lives, thence to the line of the big survey thence down the creek to the land where Phelps lives this piece lying between the lines of Phelps land and Mill land and on both sides of the Russell road, with all its appurtenances.⁶

The Russell road mentioned here is almost certainly the road that runs northwest from Abingdon through Moccasin Gap into Russell County. The reference

to the “big survey” is to the original survey that marked off the large tracts of land given as military bounties (or was it just the first “official survey” of the county after the war?). The deed books in Washington County contain many such deeds from the early 1800’s as these large tracts of lands were sold or otherwise subdivided.



1859 map of Moccasin Gap Area⁷

Reading the deed books is often like taking a stroll through the property. One such example is from a September 3, 1841 purchase of fifty acres by Martin Phelps from William Gilmore:

Beginning at a locust on or near a line of said Phelps’ old tract on the top of what is called the sink hole ridge and running thence in an easterly direction along the main top of said ridge to the cliff of the big mountain then with said cliff northerly to a line of Abram Gobble’s land thence with the line of said Gobble in a westerly direction to a line of John Phelps purchased of said Gilmore thence with said John Phelps line to a white oak corner to Martin Phelps’ old tract then with a line of the same in a southerly direction to the beginning with all its appurtenances unto the said Martin Phelps and his heirs.⁸

⁵ Deed book 10, Page 257, Washington County, VA

⁶ Washington County Deed Book 10, Page 257

⁷ Excerpt of map from Library of Virginia

⁸ Deed Book 15, Page 270, Washington County, VA

John Phelps Family

John Phelps was born May 12, 1800 in this section of Virginia to parents who had come from North Carolina. His father was Samuel Phelps (Felps), born in Rowan County, North Carolina, but not much else is known about him at this point. What we do know is that this John Phelps bought land in the Moccasin Gap area on the Washington County side of the mountain. His father Samuel Phelps owned land on the Russell County side of the mountain. By the time of the 1860 Census, John was listed as having \$2000 value in Real Estate and \$500 in Personal Estate, a respectable sum for the place and time. John Phelps must have married his first wife sometime before 1825, as we know that he had a daughter Jane born December 25, 1826. He may well have had other children from this first marriage but she is the only one listed in his will. Jane married George Washington Kestner and they lived nearby. We also don't know what happened to John's first wife but he had remarried on February 9, 1854 to Mary Margaret Mann (1829 - 1883), who was also from the Moccasin Gap area.

John Phelps and Mary Mann had one son and six daughters over the next twelve years. Lucy Ann (Louzana), William R, Martha W., Myra Finan (Phiney), Ida Frances, and identical twin daughters Evangeline Bell and Palestine L. These latter twins were born when John Phelps was 68 years old.

Among his farming pursuits, John was a beekeeper and family stories included how he put his bee stands underneath the porch to hide them from the marauding soldiers during the Civil War. Apparently this effort was not successful, but he still had five bee stands in his possession at the time of his death on August 20, 1886. John was not only a long-lived man, but also a very thoughtful man who prepared thoroughly for his eventual death. After his wife Mary died in 1883 and he was getting old himself, he prepared his will on August 22, 1885, beginning with:

In the name of God, Amen,

I, John Phelps of the County of Washington
and State of Virginia of the age of eighty five
years and being of sound mind and memory do

make publish and declare this my last will and
testament....⁹

He then proceeded to name his children and specify an amount of money or a parcel of land to be given to them. One daughter, Evangeline "Van" who had married Will Davis, is not named in the will but given a separate deed of land on the same day "in consideration of esteem and affection as my Daughter", with the sole reservation that he had the right to receive one third of the grain raised on said land during his life.



Evangeline Bell Phelps Davis, about 1905. Known as Van, she was one of the identical twins born to John and Mary Phelps in 1868. Her sister, Palestine L. Phelps Scott, was called Pal or Pallie.¹

⁹ Will Book 22, Page 308, Washington County, VA

Young Ida Frances Phelps

Ida Frances Phelps was born December 24, 1864. The Civil War was not yet over and all in the area endured hardships. Ida's long brown hair reached well past her waist by the time she was in her late teens. She often braided her long tresses into a single braid that hung down her back. She was proud of her hair and made sure that her long braid was in view for photographs. Ida was well educated for the time and place. Whether she had any training in math or science is not known, but she was very literate and also had a natural talent for art. This area of Virginia was not particularly wealthy and the Civil War had not helped the situation. Thus for her drawings and arts Ida used colored rocks from the creek to supplement her pen and pencil. The soft colored rocks were called "mark rocks". Often the outline of a drawing would be sketched in pencil and then colored in with the mark rocks and any other colored pencils she had.

When Ida's mother died in 1883 at the age of 54, Ida was only 19 years old and her little sisters Van and Pallie were only 15. On the other hand, her father was 83 years old so it must have fallen on these daughters to help care for him in his last years.

The Branch Family Arrives

Alfred Alexander Branch, or Allie as he was called, was one of the children who moved to Washington County with Nelson and Nancy Branch. Alfred was born in 1856 in Pulaski County. He had had a childhood and teenage period that must have been tumultuous. He was not yet five years old when the Civil War began. His family suffered a number of predations and indignities during the course of the Civil War. And his father, who had peaked in prosperity in 1859/1860 with 66 acres and a regular spot on the Pulaski County Grand Jury, had sunk inexorably deeper into debt during and after the Civil War until Nelson, hounded by Creditors, declared bankruptcy in 1872, under the newly passed "Uniform Law for Bankruptcy". It is not too hard to imagine, therefore, that Alfred Alexander Branch had never really known security or wealth at the time his family moved to Washington County. He had not yet married when they arrived in Washington County as a handsome, slender young man with a bold mustache and dark hair. It wasn't long before



Wedding photo of Alfred Branch and Ida Frances Phelps.
About 1883.

he caught the eye of a young girl whose family had been in the Moccasin Gap area for generations.

There is no record of their marriage in the Washington County Virginia courthouse. And none was found in the Russell County courthouse just "over the hill" from where Ida lived. But, at that time, marriages were not always recorded. It seems unlikely that they would have married anywhere else but in the Holston area as Ida's family had always lived there. In any case, they were married sometime between 1881 and the end of 1884. Alfred and Ida took up residence in a small cabin on a parcel of land that belonged to Ida's father John Phelps, probably an abandoned slave cabin. At least that is what their first child Iona believed. But the 1860 Census slave schedule does not show John Phelps as owning any slaves and this mountainous area of Virginia did not have many slaves.

It isn't known how Alfred supported his family but at least part of his livelihood was in farming. He may also have helped his father with the foundry work. One of the big employers in the area was the railroad in Abingdon and Alfred's older brother Will did work for the railroad.

When Ida's father died in 1886, she inherited a parcel of land in partnership with her sister Pallie as specified in her father's August 22, 1885 will. Her brother William R. Phelps also inherited land:

Fifth, I give and devise to my two Daughters viz. Ida F. Branch and Palestine L. Phelps, their heirs and assigns a certain tract or parcel of



John Phelps' tombstone in the Phelps cemetery hidden in the woods off of Hidden Valley Road.

land situated in little Moccasin Gap in the County and State aforesaid to be equally divided between them or their heirs. Beginning on a wild cherry on Myra F. Phelps line and with said line to the branch, thence with Martha W. Martin's line to four poplars on James

Phelps line, thence with said line to Martin Gobble's line, thence with said line to Martin Phelps line, thence with said line to James Phelps, thence with said line to William Phelps line, thence with said line to the Vangeline B. Davis corner on apple tree thence with said line to the beginning.

Sixth, I give and devise to my son W. R. Phelps his heirs and assigns, one tract or parcel of land situated in Little Moccasin Gap in the County of Washington and State of Virginia. Beginning on walnut and hickory corner to V. B. Davis's line thence with said line and fence to a stake near a large apple tree, thence with the fence to an apple tree corner of V. B. Davis and William Phelps thence with Ida F. Branch's and P. L. Phelps line to an apple tree W. R. Phelps corner, thence strait line to James Phelps line thence with said line to a hollow corner of V. B. Davis thence to the beginning. And I also give and bequeath to my son W. R. Phelps the sum of one Dollar and direct and order it to be paid in one year after my decease.¹⁰

Ida's parcel was thus adjoining those of her brother William and her sisters Myra "Phiney" Phelps, Martha Martin and Van Davis. Alfred and Ida soon had a growing family, with Iona Hope arriving September 25, 1885 and Samuel Thomas arriving October 5, 1887. Ida's sister Pallie married John J. Scott, Jr. about 1886 and so Ida and Pallie officially split their parcel of land between the two families in a deed dated August 20, 1887.

Eyes to the West

Early in 1887, Ida's brother William R. and her sister Louzana Phelps Mann both went to Colorado to homestead. They went to a section of southeast Colorado that had just been opened for homesteading in January 1887. Since they would have both collected their inheritance in 1886 and their father was dead, it might have been a good time for them to move. Louzana had married her first cousin, Joseph Mann. William had married a neighbor, Lou Kestner.

The following is an outline of events. The details about William Phelps' homesteading activities come

¹⁰ Will Book 22, Page 308, Washington County

from his final Homestead papers obtained from the National Archives Records Administration.

1861: Colorado Territory formed

1872: Territorial Board of Immigration was created with the objective to “present facts concerning Colorado as an attractive and desirable locality for those seeking homes in the Great West; to supply immigrants with full and authoritative information, as well as to aid and facilitate their journey hither”.

The official booklet printed by the Board of Immigration lists the average annual rainfall in Colorado at just over 12 inches.

1876: Colorado achieves statehood

Summer of 1886: Congress created the new Bent land district, comprising over six million acres of Southeast Colorado, and at the same time established a land office at Lamar, near the center of this district. The land was subject to entry under the “Pre-emption Homestead and Tree Culture Laws”.

August 20, 1886: John Phelps died in Moccasin Gap, Washington County, Virginia at the age of 86. His will specifies the division of his land between his children including William R. Phelps, Lou Mann, and Ida F. Branch.

This area of Virginia is rich and green with an average annual rainfall of 44 to 47 inches compared to the 12 inches per year in Colorado.

January 3, 1887: New Land Office at Lamar opened for business. “Never in the history of the wonderful West has there been such a rush of settlers and people into a new territory.”

April 8, 1887: William R. Phelps dug holes for the corners of his house on his homestead. He settled on the Northwest quarter section of Section 11, Township 30S, Range 45W, in Baca County near Vilas CO.

April 11, 1887 to May 21, 1887: William R. Phelps built a sod house on the land while his wife Lou Kestner Phelps and their five children lived in Hartland, Kansas while waiting for the house to be finished. They moved into his first house on May 21.

Summer 1887: He planted one acre in corn and garden vegetables. The corn did not mature due to the late start.

July 1887: William went to work near Vilas for a month and visited his home on weekends. He worked for J. M. Smith doing general work.

August 25, 1887: A glowing article appears in the Neosho County Journal (Kansas) telling how wonderful the new Land Office in Lamar is and how great the homesteading opportunities are in Southeast Colorado. Although this particular article wouldn't have been seen in Virginia, it is a very good summary of the attitude about homesteading.

October 14, 1887: William went to Trinidad to work to get means of supporting his family and stayed there until February 12, 1888. In Trinidad he worked on the Railroad and in a sawmill. He also worked for Mr. Scoggs 20 days in a sawmill near Powell.

January 1888: Charles McFarland built the second home for the family, according to the testimony of William R. Phelps. This was a 14x16 ft dugout. Walls were six feet of dugout and 4 feet of sod. Had a board roof and sodded dirt floor. One door, one window single sash with four panes 12x14". This 224 square foot dugout was home to the family of seven!

April 1, 1888: William went to Coolidge to get freight and was gone 8 days.

April 5 to May 10, 1888: The VILAS DEMOCRAT runs the required notice that William R. Phelps has filed notice of his intention to make final proof in support of his claim on May 29th.

Spring 1888: He plants five acres of corn and ½ acre in garden. He has seven acres broken and prepared for cropping. He has also set out 100 cottonwood cuttings (probably to meet the Tree Culture aspect of the homestead act).

May 29, 1888: William R. Phelps is accompanied by Bernard North and Joshua McFarland to Trinidad to file the necessary Testimony documents for the homestead. Bernard North and Joshua McFarland testify that they know William R. Phelps has been on his land for the stated time and has met the requirements. They both testify that Joseph Mann (William Phelps' brother-in-law) lives closer to William Phelps than they do.

William R. Phelps finally got his homestead land in 1891. He had managed to make it through the hardships that many others did not withstand. It isn't

clear how long he lived in Colorado but by 1894 his

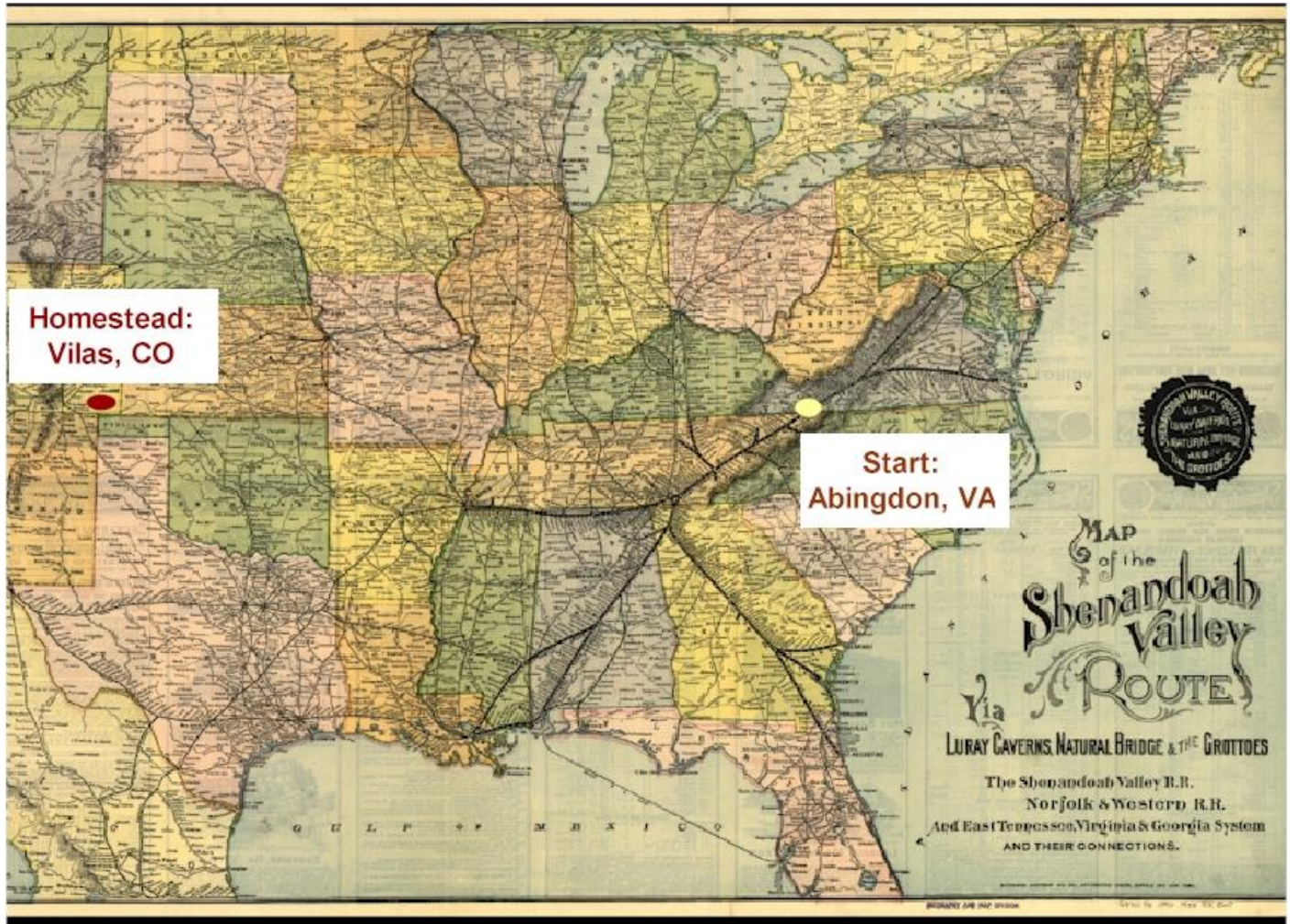


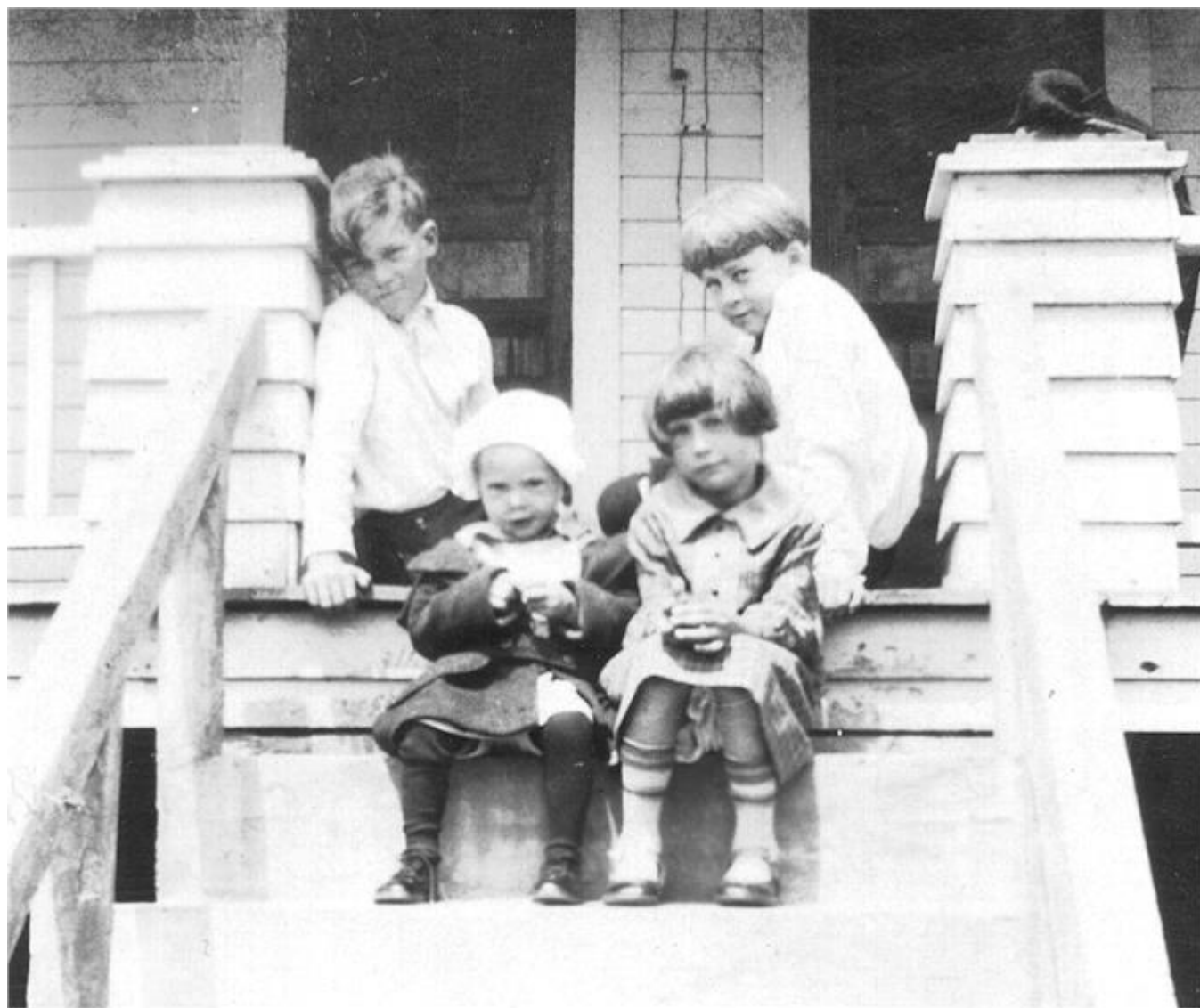
Lou Kestner Phelps and her husband William R. Phelps left Washington County Virginia in 1887 to homestead near Vilas, Colorado

family had also moved back to the Warren area of Marion County Missouri.

This was a time of great westward migration across America. New states were being admitted to the union and the railroads were spreading their network across the continent rapidly. A very favorable picture was painted about the opportunities in the west. While it was true that land could be had for free, the fertility of the plains was exaggerated. Nevertheless, the lure of free land could be irresistible and many families from the Holston area decided to head out west. In April of 1889, after selling Ida's 12-acre land inheritance for \$325, the young family set out for Colorado along with a handful of other families from the area. Ida's brother and sister had already been in Colorado for two years so they had some family in the area. There may have been some other families from Washington County out there. One of the families traveling at the same time in 1889 as Alfred and Ida Branch was Hardy Lilly with his wife Sarah Emeline "Aunt Em", her mother Matilda Gobble Kestner and their seven children: Jessie, Will, Matilda, who for some inexplicable reason was called Jimmer, Vint, Dora, Mary and Hattie. Emeline Kestner Lilly was a sister of William R. Phelps' wife Lou Kestner Phelps. The trip was to be by train, passing through Memphis and then on through Arkansas, Missouri, Kansas and finally arriving in Lamar Colorado. From there, they made their way south about 40 miles to take up a homestead near Vilas in Baca County.

This is a map of the railroad system in the United States about 1890. The main line through Virginia passed through Abingdon where the Branch family boarded the train for Lamar Colorado. The main line goes to Memphis. From there they would have taken a couple of different trains through Arkansas, Southwest Missouri, and Kansas on their way to Southeast Colorado. (Map source: Library of Congress)

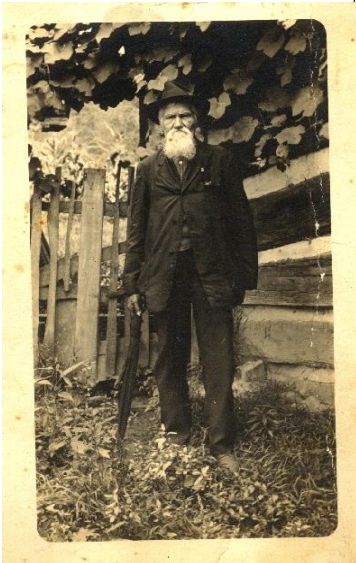




Easter Sunday, 1925. Bruce and Edith Gander in front. Harvey and Cliff Gander in back. On the steps of Harve and Iona Gander's home in Marion County, MO.

Pictorial Family Trees

Descendants of John and Mary Phelps

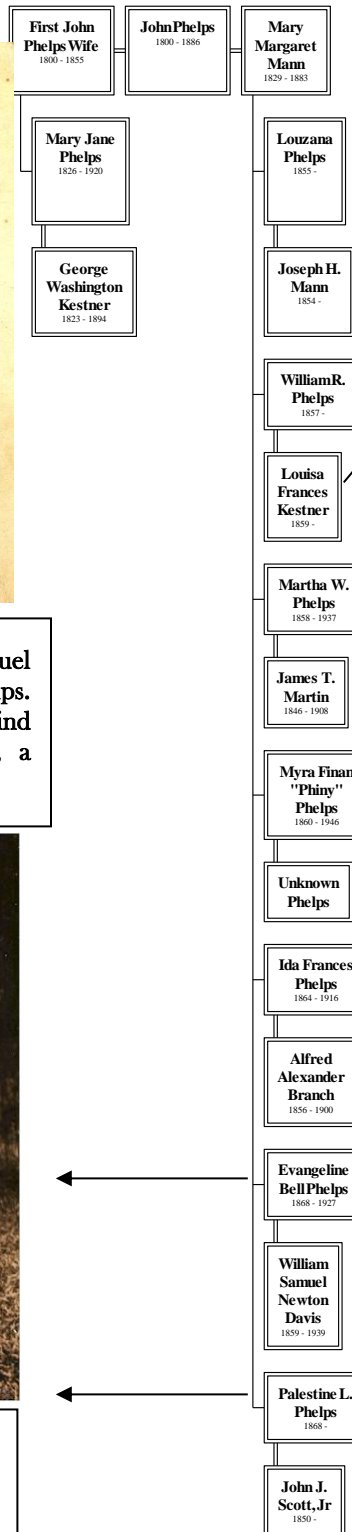


Samuel Phelps, Jr. about 1900. Samuel was a younger brother of John Phelps. Note the "porch vine" [kudzu] behind him. Photo from Patsy Lovell, a granddaughter of Samuel Phelps, Jr.



Identical twins Palestine Phelps Scott and Evangeline Phelps Davis. Not sure who is who.

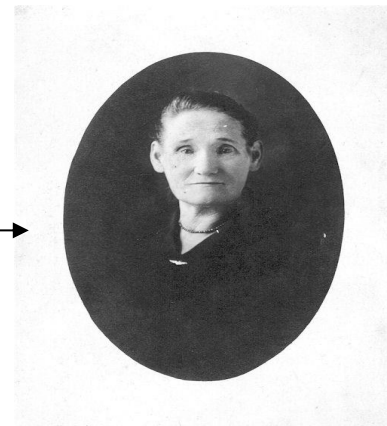
Descendants of John Phelps



Lou Kestner Phelps and her husband William R. Phelps left Washington County Virginia in 1887 to homestead near Vilas, Colorado



Alfred Alexander Branch and Ida Frances Phelps



Evangeline Bell Phelps Davis, about 1905. Known as Van, she was one of the identical twins born to John and Mary Phelps in 1868. Her sister, Palestine L. Phelps Scott, was called Pal or Pallie.¹

Descendants of Nelson and Nancy Branch

Descendants of Nelson Thomas Branch

Nelson and Nancy Branch are discussed on Disk One, Tracks 1 and 2.

Will Branch was taking grain to the mill when a Union Soldier took his horse and left him with a crippled horse. (Disk One, Track 5) Will worked for the railroad in Abingdon, VA.

Hattie Branch married Charles "Pet" Nunley. (Disk One, Track 17) After Hattie died in 1919, Pet Nunley married Della Pendleton's sister Lacy and they moved to Missouri and are buried in Andrew Chapel Cemetery, Warren, MO. Hattie's brother Cy Branch married Pet's sister Virginia Nunley. They lived in Virginia on the Nunley farm.



Leola Feathers Carrier was a daughter of Molly Branch Feathers.

Alfred and Ida Branch spent Christmas of 1894 with his half-sister Molly Branch Feathers in Johnson City, Tennessee. (Disk One, Track 18)



Effie Shannon Maiden



Leo and Effie Branch.

Robert Lee Branch stayed in Moccasin Gap on "The Knob".



Nancy Meredith
1820 - 1905

Mary J. Fleenor
1850 - 1883

George Washington
"Will"
Branch
1850 -

Sallie Campbell
1853 - 1902

Harriett E.
Hattie Branch
1852 - 1919

Charles A.
Nunley
1852 - 1939

James Cyrus
Branch
1854 -

Virginia A.
Nunley
1860 - 1909

Alfred Alexander
Branch
1856 - 1900

Ida Frances
Phelps
1864 - 1916

Susan
Elizabeth
Branch
1859 -

Hughy Leo
Branch
1861 - 1952

Effie
Shannon
Maiden
1868 - 1947

Nannie A. E.
White
1875 - 1900

Edward
Thomas
Branch
1864 - 1927

Matilda A.
Lilly
1879 - 1907

Baby Girl
Branch
1866 - 1866

Robert Lee
Branch
1869 - 1936

Susan
Rebecca



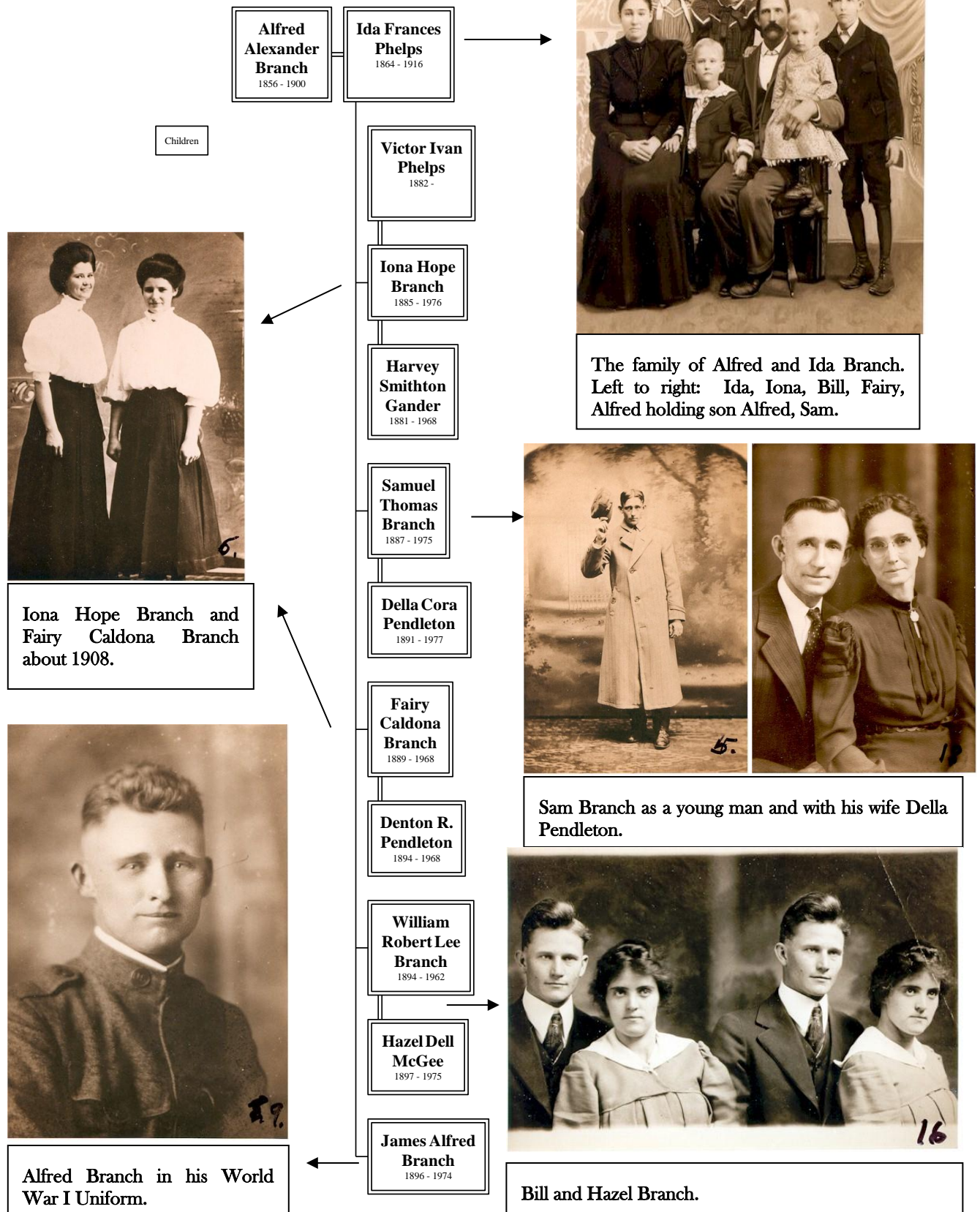
Alfred Alexander Branch and Ida Frances Phelps



Edward Thomas Branch and Matilda A. "Jimmer" Lilly.

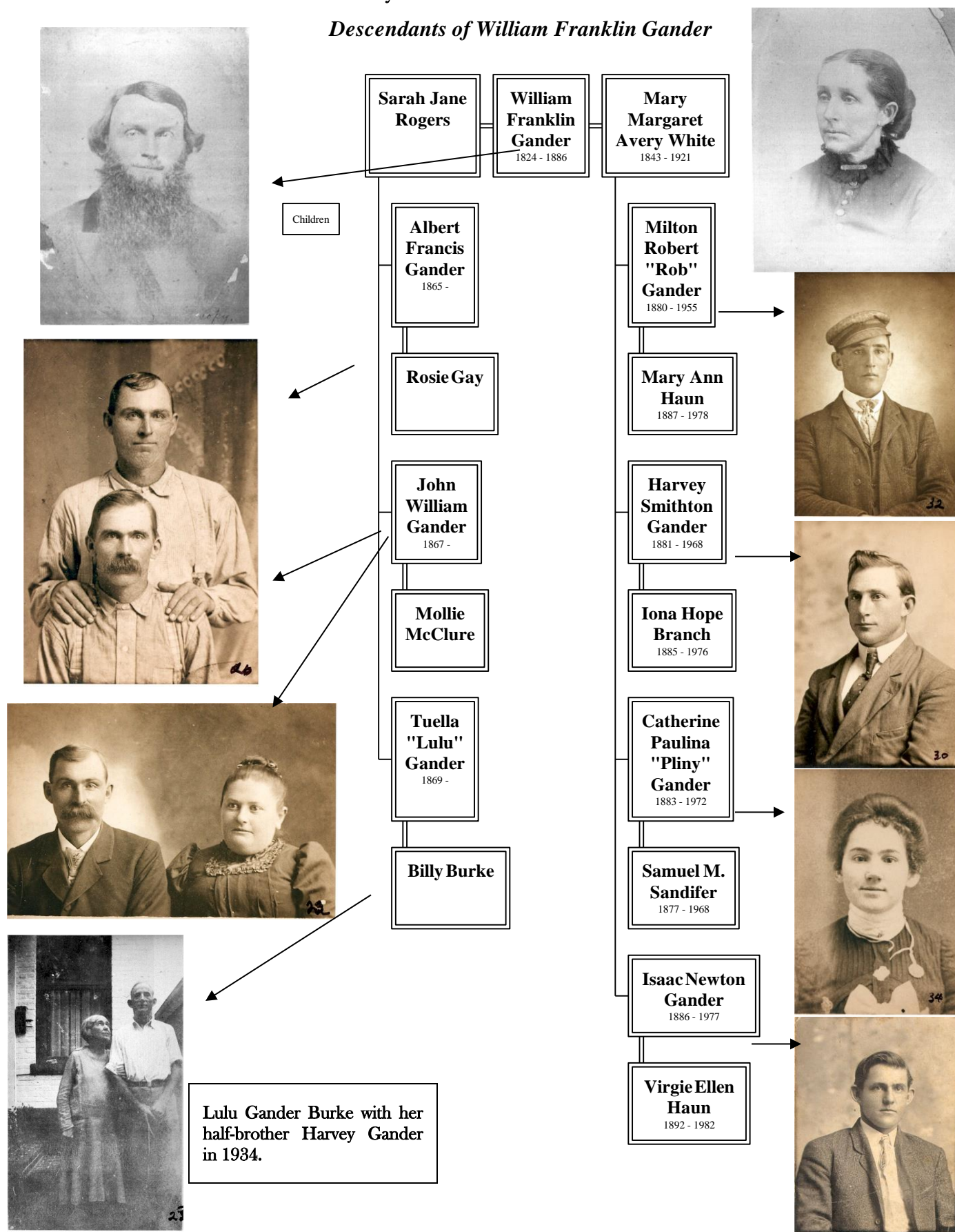
Descendants of Alfred and Ida Branch

Descendants of Alfred Alexander Branch



Descendants of William Gander and Mary White Gander

Descendants of William Franklin Gander





Mollie Haney with her corn cob pipe in the late 1930s.

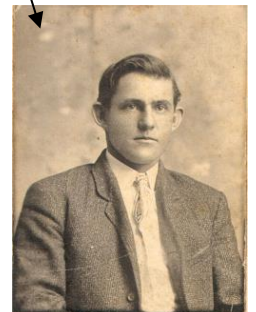
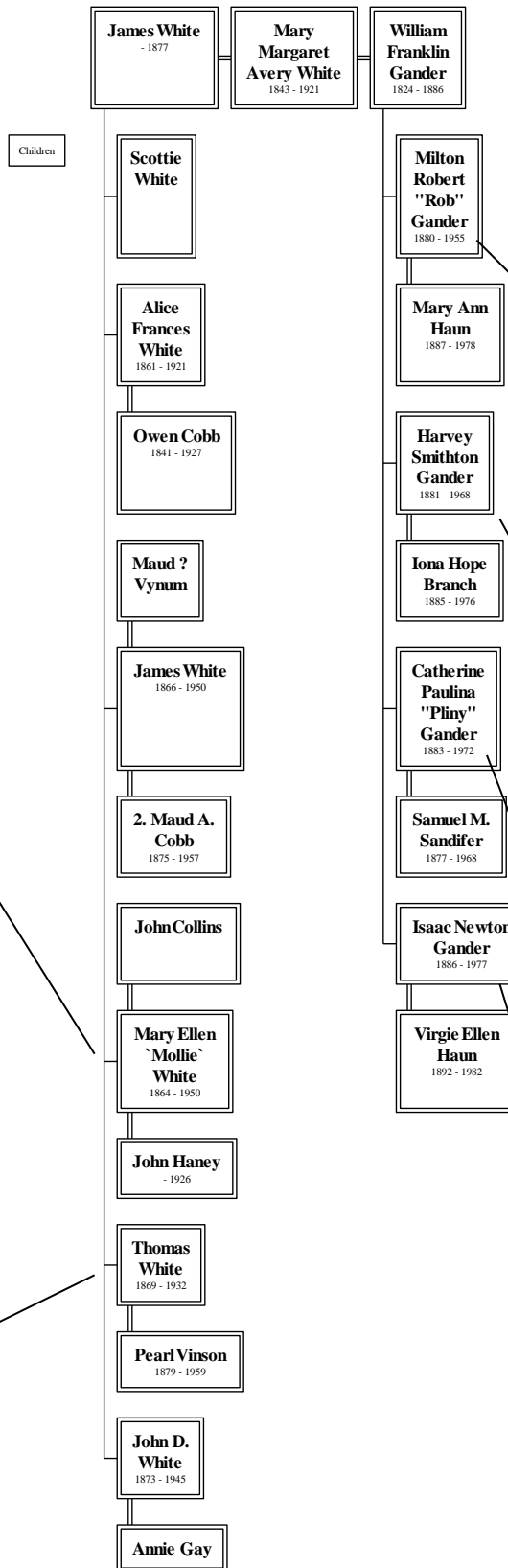


Mollie White Haney had polio as a child and could not walk.



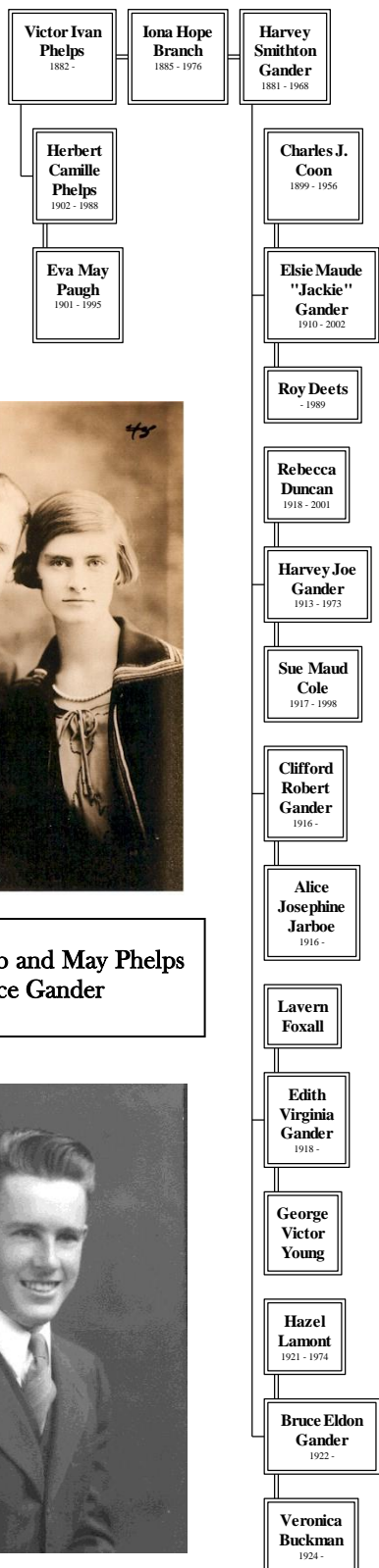
Tom and Pearl White sold their farm to Tom's half-brother Harve and Iona Gander in 1912.

Descendants of Mary Margaret Avery White



Descendants of Harvey Smithton Gander and Iona Hope Branch

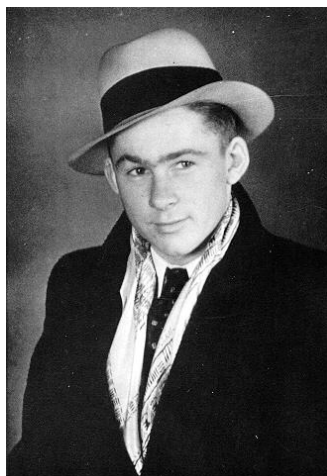
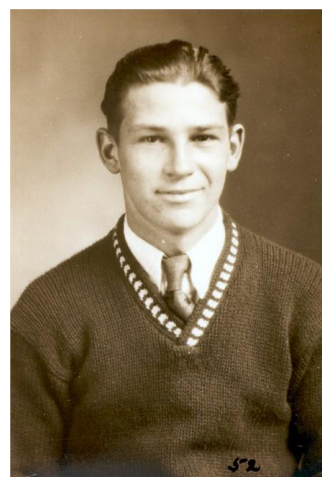
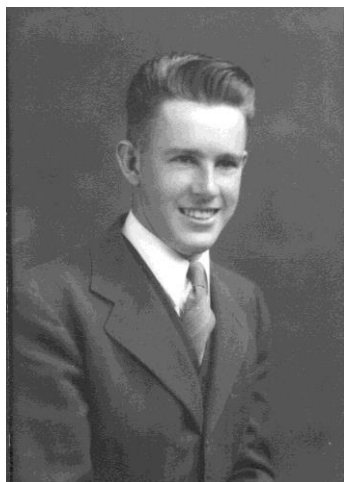
Descendants of Iona Hope Branch



Above: 1909 wedding photo of Harve and Onie.
Below: Jackie, Harvey, Cliff and Edith.



Above: Herb and May Phelps
Below: Bruce Gander



Disk One: Travels and Families

The Nelson Branch Family

1 – Nancy Meredith Branch (Audio Link)

I heard you tell Donnie that Grandma's name was Mary [Nancy] Meredith.

Yes, her maiden name.

Where was she from?

Virginia, they were Virginians, there's lots of Merediths back there.

What do you remember about her?

Grandma?

Yes?

I just remember that she was the nicest little old woman I ever knew.

Honestly? What do you remember?

I was too little to know anything about families or anything like that. They used to come up and get me. I lived up in the Gap. Uncle Ed or Uncle Bob or Uncle Cy would come and get me and take me down to Grandpa's and I'd stay a week and we would walk. And they would cut across the mountain somehow and from the Gap it's almost a straight road across the mountain to Grandpa's if you know the land. We used to walk it and I'd stay there a week at a time. I'd stay all the time if they'd let me - if my mom would let me stay. I remember one time, I was sitting at Grandma's, I had a little rocking chair at Grandma's and Grandma sit down, she was always knitting or something and I'd sit right in front of her, put my rocking chair in front of her. So one time she was sniffing, I guess had a cold, and I said to her I said, "Grandma, what are you crying for? Are you crying about your boys?" She had boys - she had two daughters but they were both married and gone. She still had boys at home and that many could come and get me. "Are you crying about your boys?" Now they lived on that little point and I thought there were 30 acres but there was only sixteen. And those boys all had to get out and earn their living somewhere; my father was one of them. And I think that's one reason my Dad had such itchy

feet. You know he never wanted to stay one place long. Just go on, that other place is a little better.

He moved a lot didn't he?

Yeah he moved a lot during his lifetime. And even when we bought that little home place over there, before we bought that little home place, Dad went down to Bowling Green to look at some farms he had heard were for sale. I remember Mother getting

***I just remember that she was
the nicest little old woman I
ever knew.***

him ready. He went on the train to Bowling Green. I remember Mother going over his clothes and tidying him up. Of course he hadn't had anything new since he was married. No new suit or anything like that. I remember he looked real nice when he left. But when he got to Bowling Green, he didn't like what he seen, so he came back.

So he came back to the little farm?

He came back and that was just a lease we took it for five years. It belonged to Bill Day. It was just land in the rough. Wasn't a thing on it except what Dad put there.

Where did you live then, while he built the house?

Oh, down - just around the hill there was a little log cabin with one room and we lived in that. We cooked and ate and slept all in one room. I remember laying in bed listening to the whip poor wills and the house was banked to keep air from getting under the house. It was cold and damp it was dirt and logs. And the whip poor wills would sit on that bank and call. They would just be almost right in my face. I'd be on one side of the logs and they were on the other. Whip-poor-will, whip-poor-will.

And then Grandpa, did he cut the timber off of that place to build the house?

Oh, yeah.

And he built just the log part first.

Oh yes we just had a great big, one room log building. And it took 30 yards of carpet to cover the floor. So you know it was a big one.

And then when did you build onto it then?

We built onto it a couple of years before Harve and I were married.

After Grandpa died?

Oh yeah, we paid for the place before we built onto it. But when we bought the place, we just paid a \$100 down on it. We had county money; you borrowed money from the county. At that time, the county could loan you money. And you had county money and you could pay just any time. But Mother saved up all her change and once a year she made a little payment on the place and paid the interest. The interest was four cents.

Four cents?

Four percent.

And then Grandpa built that barn there, too?

The barn, the crib, the henhouse, smokehouse - had to add a little here and a little there you know.

Is the barn log?

The barn's log and it's still standing. It looks in very good shape from the road.

I don't remember what it was like inside.

There's no one living there now. Mr. Scott and Mrs. Scott are old people and they moved to town. And they gave the farm or deed to his son. And the son lives in Hannibal or St. Louis, I don't know which it is. And he comes up there in the summer and he keeps it mowed. With the mower. Mows off the sugar camp - now that down in front of the house used to be a sugar camp - just a stand of beautiful trees there where we made our maple syrup. Well when we built the house, the trees were getting old, so Sam cut those trees and took them to the mill and had lumber made for the house. And then the limbs and pieces like that he put into cordwood and sold it in town for firewood. So we got money out of it.

2 - Nelson Thomas Branch

Well now you said Grandpa fought with the Confederacy in the Civil War.

Yeah

Do you remember any of the stories that he would tell about the war?

No, and Grandpa didn't talk about it.

He didn't?

No.

You don't know what battles he was in or anything?

No.

"Well where was Grandma while he was away?"

"Oh, she had all these little children around her feet trying to raise them.

Where did they live?

I gather, now no one's ever told me, but my Father always talked so much about Pulaski County and Uncle Ed did, too. And that's where I think he must have been raised, in Pulaski County.

When the war was over they were broke. They had lost all their good horses and everything nice they had. The soldiers come along and if they wanted

***"Nancy, where's my weskit?
Nancy, where's my weskit?"***

meat, they would kill a cow. They didn't buy anything they just took it. They lived off the land.

So they moved over there [to Holston]. And I don't remember my Grandpa ever doing a lick of work after they moved over there. I imagine the poor old man was wore out. Just wore out. But he was high strung and nervous. I liked him, but I didn't like him like I liked my Grandma. On Sunday morning he would always clean himself up - they always wore their Sunday best on Sunday. And he'd clean himself up. And I was there this one Sunday and he wanted his vest. Well, he didn't call it his vest he called it his weskit. "Nancy, where's my weskit? Nancy, where's my weskit?" And he was walking around on the floor, wasn't looking at all. He wanted Nancy to find his weskit. They had one of

those tall wardrobes you know like people used to have - all walnut with drawers in it and compartments and shelves and everything like that - well, he opened that thing and there was his weskit laying right there in front of his eyes. So I don't know whether he's got his weskit on in that picture or not. But he would get himself all dolled up and put on his weskit. He didn't put a coat on he put his weskit on. It was his vest.

Had his parents lived in this country then or did they emigrate from another country?

Never heard anything about it. I don't know, I imagine they were natives of America, probably from England. Most of the Virginians were from England.

3 - The Branch Boys

Well now going back to Grandma and the boys, where did the other boys go when they moved over there after the war?

Well now Uncle Ed, when we were back there in the covered wagon, Uncle Ed was in Kentucky somewhere working on the railroad. And Uncle Will was married and living in the hollow back of Uncle Pet's. Back up there where they had the still. Uncle Pet run a still, you know. He was licensed. He had a license to make brandy and he made apple brandy by the barrel. And now that was Uncle Cy. Uncle Will lived in Abingdon. And I don't know what did, was something about the railroad. About the depot. He was, I don't think he was an operator - telegraph operator - but he worked in the depot. Uncle Cy lived on his father-in-law's farm. And I guess he didn't farm, just lived on Uncle Alex Nunley's land. The older people there had big holdings because they got them when land was cheap. Well maybe they just went in and took up a claim. Homestead. I don't know. And Uncle Bob was too young to be married yet. He was when we went back there in the covered wagon, he was old enough to be married but he wasn't married.

4- Branch Family: Mollie and Dolly

Well one time you told me that Grandpa Branch, or was it Great-grandpa Branch was born in Richmond?

Grandpa Branch, I think was born in Richmond. From what I could learn. Now I don't know that

definitely. Things like that go way back, why I bet my own dad didn't know that.

Everything he had had been just swept away. He didn't have anything left.

He didn't know?

No, not for sure. My dad talked so much about Pulaski and Pulaski County you know that I figured he was born there. Or maybe even raised there. Cause when the war was over Grandpa was broke. Everything he had had been just swept away. He didn't have anything left. And he left from where he was and he had money enough to buy this little sixteen-acre plot. Now I thought it was thirty-two acres but it was just sixteen acres.

There in Holston?

On that little Knob they call it. And he had all this family, he'd been married before, and I think Grandma had too, you know just like Grandma Gander and Grandpa they both of them had sets of children and when they raised another bunch that made three sets of children in the family. Cause there was Aunt Mollie and Aunt Dolly her name was. They called her Dolly, I don't know what was her real name. They were either Grandma's daughters or Grandpa's daughters. They didn't belong to both of them. That was Leola and Bessie and Ina's mother. Mollie was their Mother. And Dolly, she married a Gillenwater, and her family was Gillenwaters. And I think they're about all dead. I don't know anything about them anymore.

Well now you said Grandpa bought that little place after the war.

Oh yeah, they had... Now I have been told they had \$200 when they moved over there and Grandma's little riding pony.

Everything else had been taken?

Yeah. They was just cleaned out.

Were any of those boys in the war?

No it was Grandpa [Branch] that went. They were too young. Grandpa fought for four years.¹¹

Do you know any of the battles he fought in?

No. Not a one. How would I know?

He was a southerner though?

Yes he was a southerner. They had some harrowing times. One time they got word to move. There was going to be a battle right there where their home was. Grandma took the children and fled over on another side of the mountain and when they met the battle was closer to them than ever, and there they were.

5 – Union Soldier Takes Horse, Ants in Biscuits

There was something about the soldiers taking the last horse they had.

That was Uncle Will was going to the mill, and he had some corn to make meal out of you know. And that was their last good horse; they had a lot of nice horses. But they kept going, the soldiers would take a horse whenever they needed it. Uncle Will was on his way to the mill and a soldier came along with an old crippled horse. He told Uncle Will to get down off of that horse. Uncle Will said why he had to go

***And took the horse, the last
good horse and left Uncle Will
with this old crippled horse.***

to the mill to get his meal ground. But they put him off of the horse and the meal, too. And took the horse, the last good horse and left Uncle Will with this old crippled horse. Of course, Uncle Will got up to the mill and back home and turned that horse out on grass and it fattened up and got to be a good horse. It was just simply worn out from so much traveling. It had “the scratches”? What’s the scratches - is some form of a hoof disease?

I think so. Probably from being in the mud and the water so much.

But it turned out to be a very good horse. But that was the last horse they had except I guess Grandma had her little riding mare then but she didn’t go out, they didn’t send her to the mill.

That was Uncle Will Branch?

Yes it was Uncle Will Branch; he was just a kid then.

Another time they come in – now this was the North – they fed off the South.

Yes, of course.

Come in and ordered a dinner cooked for them and the old Negro lady was so indignant that they had to feed them. So they made biscuits and then she come along and whispered to Grandma and said that she used the lard that had the red ants in it. In the biscuits. They had some lard that had got the ants. Seems like those little red ants used to be such pests. You know you can hardly see them. And so they had got in the lard and this old darkie used that lard for the biscuits.

Well served them right.

She felt that she was compensated for having to cook for all her trouble.

6 – Soldiers, Slaves and the Branch family

At that time when they heard the soldiers were coming they would take their hams out in the garden and buried them, or the potato patches, or wherever someone was digging. They buried their silverware and everything they thought the soldiers might want to take as souvenirs, they buried them. When those soldiers come along they would take their bayonets out and start sticking them in the ground wherever they hit anything hard, they’d find out what it is. So I imagine they unearthed a good many hams. That was something they could eat.

Now who was it, you told me the story about Dosch?

About Dosch? Now Dosch was – that was Grandma. The Negroes lived in a little cabin down there; I was born in a Negro cabin. They lived on the farm and Grandpa’s proceeds from the farm supported the family and the Negroes. So Dosch was awful sick and Bill came to Grandma’s house

¹¹ Nelson Branch was in Company F, 54th Virginia Infantry for the last six months of the war. He did not serve as a soldier for four years but may have done some civilian service.

and told her he wanted her to come because Dosch was awful sick. So she got up and she always doctored with poultices and things like that. She went to the meal barrel to get some meal to take down, she knew Dosch wouldn't have any, or she suspected he wouldn't, to make a hot poultice. And she was scraping the bottom of the barrel to get the meal for a poultice, and old Bill patted her on the shoulder. At that time Negroes had to keep their distance, of course. So she said: 'Bill, was that you

patting me on the shoulder?'" No ma'am, No ma'am, that was Massa patting you on the back for being so good to Dosch. He wouldn't admit he did it, (he meant the Lord).

That must have been when they lived in Pulaski County somewhere.

Yeah, they were still in Pulaski, they hadn't come from there.

The John Phelps Family

7 - Grandpa Phelps

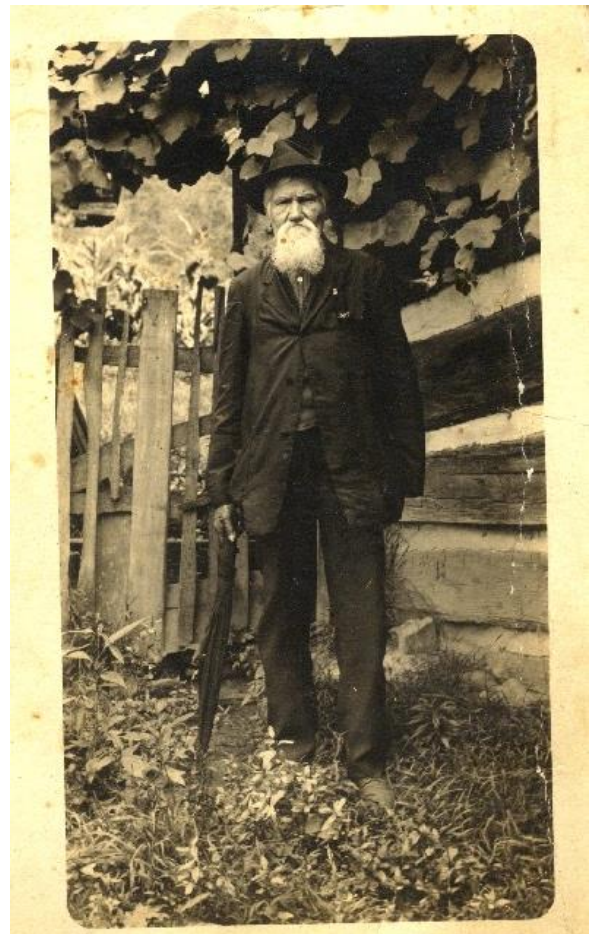
Oh, Grandpa, he never migrated, he was just always put. That is Grandpa Phelps. And they lived right where Aunt Phine lived. In that house, Grandpa built that house with three fireplaces standing just as straight as a string yet today. It's not being used, they built a new room on and they didn't build a fireplace in it, or it don't look like they built it in.

"Was Grandpa Phelps in the war?"

No, I say, he was too old to go. He was at home, trying to take care of what he had. They didn't take very good care, those soldiers - that road through the Gap was the only pass between there and West Virginia for miles and miles. So there was always a lot of traffic over that road, they hauled goods you know for the different little stores along the highway and freight running over there from one state to the other. Anything and everything and there was all kinds of people coming along that road. It was rock at that time. Aunt Effie¹² said at one time it was paved. I never knew that, I never heard anything about it. It sure is rocky enough so when you walk over it you feel like it is brick.

Well now, Grandmother Phelps, where was she from? Do you know? Do you remember her?

¹² Effie Maiden married to Hughy Leo Branch. She was also from Moccasin Gap. Leo and Effie were among the Virginians who homesteaded in Colorado.



Samuel Phelps, Jr. about 1900. Samuel was a younger brother of John Phelps. Note the "porch vine" [kudzu] behind him. Photo from Patsy Lovell, a granddaughter of Samuel Phelps, Jr.

Oh, no, she died before I was born. I just vaguely remember Grandpa.¹³ He was a quiet gentle old

¹³ This is not possible. She was only 11 months old when John Phelps died in August 1886. She might remember his brother Samuel instead. Or maybe she is just recounting what her mother told her about John Phelps.

fellow. He used to make shoes for the family, and about one pair a year each was all he would get made because there were several of them.

One pair per person per year?

Yes and Mama would walk to church barefooted, and sit down and put on her shoes before she got to church. To save their shoes, you know. They had to save them.

8 - Chestnuts

Grandpa used to take my Mother up on the mountain in the fall to gather chestnuts. And they'd go up there and they would stay all night. They would build them up a big fire and sleep close to the campfire. They'd have two days from one climb of the mountain.

They must have carried blankets along?

They must have had a blanket apiece. Surely you know where they'd build up that fire. And they roasted chestnuts. Oh, she said they were good when they would roast those chestnuts and eat them. Warm, you know, from the fire. And up on that mountain is a cranberry bog, too, and they would also gather cranberries. They just grow wild up on the big mountain.

In the bog there?

Yes. Always thought I wanted to get up on that mountain, but when I was back there I - Edith was sick, she had dysentery - she was too sick for me to leave with somebody else. So I never went, but Harve went. He was up on the big mountain several times.

I was up there; I went with him one time.

Did you?

Yes, I remember the beech trees.

Those big chestnut trees, I bet?

The beeches also, beautiful big trees. Beautiful.

You know they've cut those mountains off now. Some big company went in there. The chestnuts died so they have cut the mountains off and sold the lumber.

No big timber any more?

No. Not unless it's somewhere they couldn't get to it.

9 - Aunt Phine's house, Nelson Branch's Foundry

However, folks are building back. They say that it's going to be up new again.

I wonder if Aunt Phine's and Aunt Van's houses are still there?

Grandpa's old house - Aunt Phine's house is still there, Aunt Van's is falling down. I imagine it's down on the ground by now.

Grandpa Phelps built Aunt Phine's house?

Yes, I understand he did. They built onto it twice. The back part was the original part was log. And then they built this story and a half front, four rooms - two down, two high. And that big straight fireplace, you know. The fireplace stands there as firm and true today as the day it was built.

It was native stone wasn't it?

Native limestone. White limestone.

Now didn't Grandpa [Branch] have a mill there somewhere in Holston?

No he never had ever that I knew of. He had a foundry for many years. They made those patterns for cogs you know and pieces of iron. They worked in that iron. They had sand and they had these patterns and they'd press them down in this wet sand and get the impression and then they'd fill that with molten iron. And they would come out with whatever kind of a design they wanted.

Was that at Holston?

I don't know where that was. He had his patterns in the old basement. I expect you saw them when we visited back there because that old basement was still there.

I don't remember the patterns.

Well, now they did have when I was a kid, when we back in the covered wagon, they had a whole mess of those patterns in the basement. Wooden patterns they used to make the impressions with.

Now that house that Mildred [Branch] lives in is the same house there.

It's not the same house. They tore the old house down and the school – it was a project of the school – they tore the old house down and rebuilt it into this small one-story – the old house was two-story – and they built it into this one-story. And it is much nicer, the old one was full of cracks because of the rough lumber, you know, in the original house. But Mildred has lined the walls and laid down new floors and added on some extra rooms to it and she's just got a nice little home.

Homesteading in Colorado

10 – Trip to Colorado

When you started [on the covered wagon trip to Virginia], did you leave from Shelby County? Where were you living when you started on that trip?

Oh, we were living over on my home on a – just around the hill a little ways, you know that road that runs east and our corner, they call it the four corners. Well there's a road that runs east and west and then north and south, you know. Well that road that runs east on back there, well, there's a little one-room log cabin and that's where we started from.

But when we first lived here we were in Shelby County, for a year or maybe two years. Up near the Lone House. In the Hagerty and Simmons neighborhood. And we moved down there and I never could understand why Dad wanted to move down there, except down there was where the rest of the Virginians that come from Colorado had settled down there. I think Dad just wanted to be close somebody from home. And when we moved down there we moved in that little shack and we'd had a very nice place where we'd moved from. And they said Sam didn't even want to get out of the wagon when he seen it. Why he just wasn't going to get out.

Now, you said the Virginians who came from Colorado. Who went to Colorado with you?

Now I can't remember Lilly's going to Colorado with us but they did. Because Jessie teased me that on the train going to Colorado I cried for Castoria, of all things, on the train. I wanted some Castoria. And

Now Grandpa and Grandma [Branch] are buried on that land aren't they?

No, they are buried out there in front of Uncle Pet's [Nunley].

Uncle Pet?

Uncle Bob and Aunt Sue is buried up there and that brother that was a half-wit. He was buried up there. And then Tom Lester was buried up there on Grandpa's place. Out on the Knob. You go out – you remember the house stands up here – and the hill comes around like this now, you go out on this point out here, that's where they were buried.

***“Onie wants Castoria!
Onie wants Castoria!”***



“Onie wants Castoria! Onie wants Castoria!” And they followed us, we come on the train. We went

out there in the spring, I know it must have been March, and took up a claim and built a sod house. And by the next spring we was so sick of Colorado that we left it before we spent all the money we had. Because it was – you had to buy everything you had to eat because nothing grew there, it was just too dry. And so we came back this far and Kestners¹⁴ had already come ahead of us and settled over there near Pee Dee. And we come next and they helped us to get located in Shelby County. And then the Hardy Lilly's – there was ten of them now made the trip¹⁵ – an old lady and two covered wagons. And they brought their cows along and they had their milk and the lived off that milk. They run out of money and they had to sell one of the cows to get on into Monroe. And now it was Mary that come out and spent a couple of weeks with me last winter. And she says, "You know, I don't know what we'd have done if we hadn't had those cows". And she said, "I don't know how we made it after we got here". I said, "Well, I know how you managed, you had good neighbors and they all pitched in to help you out". Was what happened. She said Uncle Hardy just had a quarter when he got to Monroe. Well they pitched in and the folks had a log rolling and cut the timber and built the house in a day. Of course, it was small but they attached a lean-to kitchen to it and that give them more room.

Was that the one up on top of the hill?

Yeah. Then they added on to it and the old part, the original part has been gone for years. But Grandma Kestner was Aunt Em's mother. Uncle Hardy's wife was a Kestner. And he would work; he traded one mule for forty acres of land. And that's where they got the timber and the stuff to build their house.

Uncle Hardy?

Yes. And now I know that the neighbors helped them out because when we went to Shelby County, we just moved in an old house that had been empty for a long time. All it needed was somebody in it. And there was a sack of potatoes, homegrown potatoes, I remember them. And we had chickens

of every imaginable color and breed. And we didn't buy chickens. And they was just ... hens, stick them in the hen house. So we had chickens for eggs, you know, and even to eat if we needed to eat them. And things like that were they just cared what they had off the farm and I'm just pretty sure that's what happened down at Uncle Hardy's because there were ten of them. And there was just Dad and Sam and Fairy and I and mother. We were just a little family, you know, compared to the Lilly's.

11 – Vilas, Colorado

Both you and Sam were born in Virginia then?

Oh yeah.

And Fairy in Colorado?

Fairy was born in Vilas, Colorado. And Bill and Alfred were born down there at the old home place. Well, now Bill was born in this log cabin as I told you we moved down there when we started. And Alfred was born in the new house in our house that's standing today. My father built it.

Vilas at one time was a boom town. I don't know why the people all went in there. For the same reason we did because there were some of those promoters. They talked it up. Of course, it is rich dirt. That is very fertile soil out there. If you just had the moisture to irrigate. Oh, I think they do irrigate now.

Yes they do.

They've got a big lake up there now at the twin buttes. And bring water down. But when we were there there was no such thing as irrigation. And they went out there and broke that sod and planted that corn. And when the hot winds came – which they do in Colorado – it just burnt the corn up. And that was the only crop that we knew how to raise and we didn't have anything else. So we were out there on the plains and Dad went to work at ??? And I don't know whether he was working on an irrigation project at that time or was working on the railroad. But they were doing some kind of public work. And he come home with enough money left after he paid his board to buy a pound of coffee. He saw that wasn't going to work. So we couldn't stay there. Well, we stayed in that sod house until fall and there

¹⁴ Probably Furman P. Kestner, brother of Hardy Lilly's wife Emeline.

¹⁵ There were seven children, Hardy and Em Lilly and her mother Matilda Gobble Kestner.

was a little rock house just down the slope from us and some neighbor had built it and run off and left it. So we moved into that rock house. And it must have been in September. Cause Fairy was born December the 5th [1889]. And this awful blizzard came up and Dad and Uncle Hardy both had gone to somewhere to get a load of wood. Cottonwood, soft wood is all they could get out there, you know. And the snow had drifted so deep that when Dad got home - I don't know how he ever got home, but he did get home - he had to dig the snow away from the door before he could open the door. We had a chicken coop with some hens in it and the snow drifted over and smothered the hens. So, of course, we dressed them and ate them. They didn't go to waste. And so I guess he decided, we were expecting

Dad decided that was no place to have a baby, away out there where you had to dig the snow away from the door in September.

our baby and I guess Dad decided that was no place to have a baby, away out there where you had to dig the snow away from the door in September. We left and moved into Vilas in this old store. I guess we lived in it for free. And the shelves were so deep and we kids would play hide and seek in those shelves. We lived in the back of the store. There was a small room back there that was heated. Of course, you couldn't heat the store, that was the front part of the store. That was a very pleasant winter in Vilas. We pulled up and we went - I don't know who hauled us to Lamar, but somebody with a team, it was probably Uncle Hardy Lilly. We packed ourselves in that old wagon with blankets and comforters wrapped around us and it must have been forty miles from Vilas to Lamar. Anyhow, it was an all day journey to Lamar. That's where we got our train to come to Missouri.

When you went out there?

We went on the train.

Did Grandpa then have to buy tools, plows and a team and all?

I don't know whether he brought those things or whether he traded work for the use of their equipment. I don't know just how. Now Uncle Joe Mann - Lester Mann you've heard me speak of Lester Mann.

Yes

Well Uncle Joe Mann was the first one out there and he had his house built and he'd been there a year or so and I imagine that's one reason that we happened to be a nucleus of us in that one location. People, you know, wrote back and said the country's good, it's beautiful out here and all that. But they hadn't ever been tested. That's prosperous country now. People out there are doing all right. I can remember one time I was telling Dad one time about Vilas and all and I said, "We ought to have stayed out there. We'd probably be well to do by now." Harve said, "I'm glad you didn't." He said, "I wouldn't have ever known you. I'm glad you didn't stay out there."

12 - Colorado families

Well now where did Lilly's live?

Well they lived not far from us because I know they visited back and forth. But I couldn't say where.

Did they move into town then, too?

I don't know whether they did or not. I have no remembrance of that, of what became of them. Because now they come home to here. I guess it must have been about March when they started. Now they drove all that way from Vilas to Monroe City they had two wagons and one extra horse. There were ten of them in the family and they brought two cows. And now they cut out in that wild country by themselves coming across and I said my, suppose something terrible had happened to them. Just a lone wagon out on the prairie. They got into Kansas and they began to get low on money and they had to sell one of their cows. But they were living off of those cows. Those cows were milkers. And Aunt Em¹⁶, as we always called her, she'd heat that milk

¹⁶ Sarah Emeline Kestner Lilly, wife of Hardy Lilly and sister of Lou Kestner Phelps.

and she stirred up drop biscuits and dropped them into the boiling hot milk. They had no way of baking anything but they cooked that bread in the boiling hot milk and ate it like we would French toast.

It was really a sort of a dumpling, wasn't it?

Yeah, it was a dumpling.

I bet they were good.

Well they lived off of them. They lived off of them. And Mary said, now Vint [Lilly] could tell you about that but Mary doesn't have that memory of it. But Vint said that .. interruption.

I said to Vint I said I guess you had to walk and drive the cattle didn't you? The livestock? He said no, he said after the first day or two they just followed. As they moved along the livestock followed along behind them. Now of course I imagine they stopped to take a nip here and there.

You take ten people and go to sleep them, they cover some territory!

Well, they'd have to stop to graze their stock.

And I imagine the folks had to find a shelter besides their wagon at night, too.

Well, in March it could have been very cold.

Oh, yeah.

And there wouldn't really be too much for the cattle to graze on.

No.

Did they bring household goods, too?

Well, they had the wagon loaded with whatever they had. With their possessions. And now they had to have feed for those horses. I just don't know how they managed it, but anyhow they come very near of getting out of money. And Mary says I don't know what we did. She says when we got to Monroe we just had a quarter. And she says I don't know how we managed. I said, I can tell you how you managed, I said you had good neighbors. They traded a mule for that forty. Where the house is up on top of the hill.

Then they went and built a house there I suppose.

Well the neighbors come in and helped them to build it. I think they cut the timber and put it up in a day. And then they built a room for the kitchen the whole length of the house and they had room in it for an extra bed or two. So that gave them a little more room. You take ten people and go to sleep them, they cover some territory! Cause, Grandma, old Grandma Kestner was along. And she wasn't well, she had one of these big aneurysm they call it on her throat.

A goiter?

Yes, she died with it. But she come up and visited us in Shelby county and she just liked it so well up there and she went home and she told the folks back down home, she said why they've got sweet potatoes in their garden as big as a coffee pot!

Does that thing [the tape recorder] tick?

No, I just wanted to see if it were running or not. Sweet potatoes as big as a coffee pot!

They came before you did then?

No, we come first.

You came first.

We come in March, we came on the train.

Well, they came [to Missouri] when, then?

Huh?

When did they come, then?

Well, I don't know what time they arrived but it was too late to plant a crop of corn. But they made a garden, they had a big garden.

Well, then if they came later, why they would've found something for the cattle and the horses to graze on along the roadsides and so on.

I think they were just six weeks making that trip across [from Vilas, Colorado to Monroe City, MO].

Six weeks, imagine that!

Sounds a little bit like moving too fast.

No six weeks for that.

It's about 800 miles from here to Vilas.

Just imagine that. Of course, I suppose they stopped in the towns and bought flour and supplies. Of

course, to keep those cows going, they would've had to have stopped and grazed.

Yes, they kept their milk up.

They had to.

Uncle Hardy was a risky old fellow. He just seemed to have an awful lot of common sense, but he couldn't read or write.

Had he come from Virginia originally?

They went to Virginia [Colorado] at the time we did, however I can't remember it. But Jesse, that's their oldest son, always wanted to tease me about Castoria. And we were all on the train at the same time. And so Mom gave me a dose of Castoria, well I wanted some more of it. That wasn't enough, it was so good. And Jesse used to tease me and say Onie wants some Castoria, Onie wants some Castoria. I just don't remember that but Jess remembers it and he's always teased me about it, and that's what he'd always say, "Onie wants some Castoria".

Well where were you going on the train?

Where were we going? We was going to Colorado when that happened.

Oh, you went out on the train.

Yeah, we all went on the train. We had quite a scare at Memphis. The train was ferried across on a ferry, across the river, and as we started down the grade to the ferry, the engine jumped the track. And all the people on the train were all upset, you know. They just thought well if that thing would start rolling it would put us all right in the river. But they got some kind of a big machine there and lifted that engine back. Even in those days they had things to work with. And they set that engine back on the track and we crossed the river, on the ferry on the train.

Well that was after you'd gone out there in the covered wagon.

No, that's when we were - we never went out there in the covered wagon.

To Virginia you did.

We went to Virginia but that was afterward. When we went to Virginia it was after we'd made all this. We went from here [Shelby County, MO] to Virginia.

On the train?

On the covered wagon.

But then did you come - how did you come back then?

From Colorado?

No, from Virginia.

Oh, we came back on the train.

Well, wasn't that when you almost had the accident at Memphis?

No, that was our first trip out.

Well you went directly from living in Virginia then to

It was just as good a dirt as anybody ever saw. But when the water won't come ...

Colorado to homestead?

Yes'm. A whole bunch of us. I don't know how many but I know there were three or four families.

How did you happen to go?

Some promoter like Bill Muldrow. Just got them all enthused and they thought they could make a fortune out there and that good deep dirt.

Free land.

And it was good dirt.

I'm sure it was.

It was just as good a dirt as anybody ever saw. But when the water won't come why you - they even plowed that ground up and planted it in corn. And they ought to have known better than that. But they didn't, they thought they could go out there and farm just like they would in Virginia.

And when we come home on the train, we come back to Missouri. Mother was sitting by the window watching the change in the ground, you know. And so as soon as they got to where she could see a poke bush or a mullein, she said, "Oh Allie, look, there's a mullein, there's a poke bush." She just was thinking that now she could have a garden now. You get to where the poke and mullein would grow, why anything else would grow. And we got to Monroe in

the night sometime and I don't remember where we stayed all night but of course we went to a hotel. And the next morning we got up and went to what - now about where Mr. Veatch has his office - was a

little restaurant. Grandma and Grandpa Tucker run it. That was their name. And we went in there and bought our breakfast

The Covered Wagon Trip from Missouri to Virginia

Fall of 1894.

13 - Covered Wagon Turns Over

How much money did you have when you started out?

I don't know. I don't have any idea He sold his crop in the field. He had corn in the field, a pretty good corn crop. But then he spent a lot of his money preparing. Mother, I guess, made a kind of cover for the wagon.

Yes.

And she sure sewed some good stitches in it because it wouldn't rip when the wagon turned over. I tried to go out that hole.

Did the wagon turn over?

It turned over in the creek.

I didn't know about that. Tell me about it.

It was an exciting time. It was right after we had stayed all night on the boat at Memphis. And the ??? worked all night that night. And the horses had never been on a boat before anyhow and they were nervous the next day or two. So, shortly after that we cooked our dinner and Dad had a little water in the bucket and he threw it on the campfire. And you know how it will whoosh? Well the horses bolted. He had the lines but he dropped one of those lines and that just pulled them right down the creek bed. And the wagon - one wheel was up on the bank and one was down in the creek bed. And it got higher and higher and higher and finally it just turned over in the creek. And Dad has slipped and was straddle of the tongue. So he couldn't get the other line. So when the wagon turned over, the horses stopped. And we were all stranded in that bedding in there and I got my head through that hole in the back and I screamed and I wiggled and I wanted to get out of that hole so bad. I seen that I couldn't do it so I crawled back and Mom, she was crawling out from

under the cover and pulling Bill out. She thought Bill was hurt. There wasn't anybody hurt. And Sam, he wasn't on the wagon. He got tired of riding and walked ahead. And you know it wasn't but just a few minutes until there were so many people there, they just seemed to come from nowhere. And they just stood there so helpless, they didn't know what to do. And some of them - well Dad said his little boy was down the road and so someone took out after Sam and they found him a mile down the road sitting on the bridge.

Waiting for you.

Waiting for us. And so the people took us in their home by the fire until they could get the wagon out and repair it. It broke something. And we went on our way. But you know I thought that was the crummiest bunch of people I ever saw. They all used snuff and their teeth was black and dirty. Their faces were all smeared up from using that snuff. You get into a snuff using neighborhood and just look at the people. They were kind hearted and all that but they didn't know what to do and we didn't either. Dad had to get us out of it. Course we all got out of the wagon and all that. Fairy and Bill was a baby. There was just Fairy and I and Bill because Sam was sitting on a bridge waiting for us.

14 - Covered Wagon Trip

Well, that was the most exciting thing that happened. Except for the man that kept coming down from the mountain and asking us if we'd seen any cattle. Mom said, "Well this would just be a good place for them to get a bunch together and kill us and rob us. And none of our folks would ever know anything different." And Fairy said, oh she said, "Can't nobody rob us! Daddy's got a gun and Mama's got the money in the didy [diaper] bag." "Mama's got the money in the didy bag." But it turned out that

the man actually was hunting for his cattle. We come out – we were going on just a blazed road – and we come out on the main road it was on top of the mountain and there was an old lady sitting on a woodpile cracking walnuts and eating them. And so Dad stopped his team and asked her if that was the

And Fairy said, “Can’t nobody rob us! Daddy’s got a gun and Mama’s got the money in the didy bag.”

right direction to whatever town we were going to and she never stopped cracking walnuts. She just told him it was and she kept right on cracking, she never missed a lick. I thought that was so funny. But we was really happy to get up on out of that dark, gloomy canyon that we’d been traveling. That was in Arkansas I think, either in Arkansas or south Missouri.

Oh, that must have been right after you started then.

Oh my, we were a long time after we started. We wandered all over those mountains. [Alfred was looking for a farm that would suit him.]

15 – Staying with the Mean Lady

You said that, one time you told us about some of the people where you stayed all night. The different kinds of people you stayed with.

Oh, well we had all kinds of people.

What do you remember about them?

Oh, I remember the good and the bad. I remember the one that made us get out at three o’clock in the night, it seemed like it was three o’clock. It was still dark anyhow. Oh, this was a cold day and we were cold and sleepy and we didn’t find anyplace where we could stay. And finally we came up to a little white frame house and Dad said, “We’ll try here”. So he went to the door and he told the lady that we would like to sleep on her kitchen floor for the night. She had a dog - the dog was tied up. The dog was barking so viciously. Dad said: “Does your dog bite?” She said no. And so he come on out to the wagon. He was tired. I can see him yet. He said,

“We can stay all night”. He reached up and took Bill. The rest of us all climbed down and started to get things out. So he went ahead with Bill and when we got to the house she had loosened that dog, and the dog bit dad. Dad said, “I thought you said the dog didn’t bite”. That put him Dad in a bad humor, but I don’t suppose he said anything ugly to her, except told her she lied. We slept on her kitchen floor. Very early the next morning she came to the kitchen door and told Dad it was time to get up. Dad said it was too early - it was too dark to be out on the road. She went back, but two or three times more. The last time she said, “Well by the time you get your horses geared up” – that’s a Virginia term or Eastern anyhow – “and the wagon loaded, it will be light enough”. So he did get up and we all got up. When Dad went to pay her, he only had five dollars and he didn’t have the right change. So she had to get her hired man up and send him six miles to get that five dollars changed. For a little kid like me, I was so aggravated at her that I thought it was just good enough that that man had to get up and go get that money. Why, the poor man, I ought to have felt sorry for him.

You all were sitting around waiting for him to come back with the money?”

Well, no, he went horseback with us into town, and they gave him the change and he took the right money back to her. No we weren’t sitting around waiting. And so that morning we traveled and traveled. And everybody said, “Where did you stay last night?” And when Dad would say, “Oh we stayed with widow so-and-so”. And they would say, “Oh, that woman – why she is the meanest woman in this county!” Nobody had any good words for her. That same day, along about noontime, we stopped to inquire our way, had to do a lot of inquiring – and the people said “where did we stay” and we told them. So the people had just butchered and they wanted us to come in and have dinner with them. So we did – and their name was Babb and they were kin to people in Shelby County, Missouri. So Dad said, “Why those folks are our neighbors in Missouri.” And you know they like to just didn’t want to let us go on! They didn’t want to let us start out, I mean. It was like getting a letter from home.

16 – Staying with the Preacher

Well what were some of the nice places you stayed at?

Well that was a nice dinner [at the Babb's] with hot biscuits and jam. So the next one was a Preacher. We thought he would be all right. We were in - Dad was putting up the team - and we were sitting around the heating stove getting warm before we went to bed. The dining room was off over here to my right, set with a nice white tablecloth and everything like that. They came in and the Preacher bowed his head and said grace and never asked us if we had had supper or anything like that, and I said, "Mamma, don't you know that man, the Preacher, he said the blessing and he never asked us if we had had any supper." Mamma shook her head and stuck her mouth out. She wanted me to keep my mouth shut. Of course, they heard it. But that was what was 'called' a Preacher, just by calling him that.

Had you had your supper?

No, we hadn't had any supper.

Did you have any supper that night?

I guess we ate syrup and bread. We couldn't cook anything. But we surely ate some syrup and bread. We always kept that on hand.

Then a few nights after that we come to a - now this was a little bit of heaven - we came to a nice big barn, the kind that you could drive right through the center. With the hay just dripping down from above on each side. Mom said, "This would be a nice place to stay all night - we could put the team in the barn if we could get to stay." About that time an old man drove up in a buggy, pulled by a gray horse. He

***"Now if you ever meet up with
any of my family out in the
world as you are today, what
you owe me is to treat them
like I've treated you."***

had long white whiskers. Dad went to him and asked him if he was the proprietor of the place. He said he was. Dad said, "We are traveling and wondered if we could stay the night with you. Put our

horses in your barn and our pallets on the floor in your house".

"Oh, yes, get right down, get right down! Put your horses in there and feed them. Get right down." And so we climbed out of the wagon and it was such wonderful hospitality. So he led the way to the house and told Dad what to do about the horses and just left Dad in charge of that. We went to the house. It was cold and nobody was in the house. So he got down on his knees before the fireplace, blowing the fire alive with his breath, you know, to get it to kindle up. It was pine shavings he put on it so it soon burst into flame. He looked up and he seen Bill - Bill was shaking, I guess. He said, "That child is cold - give him to me". So he got up and took Bill from Mothers arms, and he had brandy flask in his pocket and he gave Bill a big swig of that raw brandy. Bill sputtered and almost strangled - so he beat him on the back and walked the floor with him, shook him around a little bit and Bill wasn't cold any more. So his daughters came home - one was a schoolteacher, and the younger one was a student. They turned in and fixed supper. They made the most lovely biscuits - buttermilk biscuits I'll say - and blackberry jam and had just everything good on the table. And they seated us all around the table. So after supper we went into the parlor and there were three or four boys. And Mom and Dad was both good singers and I could sing, too. So we sang. We sang hymns until it was bedtime.

Dad said, "Well, it's time. I'll get our bedding and make the beds down on the floor". It was time to be going to bed. And the old gentleman said, "No company of mine is going to sleep on the floor. You're going to sleep in beds. You leave the bedding out there, you're going to sleep in a bed." He put us in the best beds they had and it was warm. So the next morning we had a nice hot breakfast and everything that went with it. When we got ready to leave why Dad said to him, he said, "Well, how much do I owe you?" He expected to pay a big price for all that. He said, "Now if you ever meet up with any of my family out in the world as you are today", he says, "What you owe me is to treat them like I've treated you." And he said, "Now here's my baby, sixteen year old girl, she washed the dishes and helped with the cooking - so if you want to make her a gift, that's alright. But you don't owe me anything." So Dad give her two dollars.

That was a mighty cheap night's lodging and meals!

That was just a little bit of heaven.

That was quite a contrast wasn't it?

That was a contrast; I'd say it was.

17 – Aunt Mollie Branch Feathers

Tell me, how did we get to be kin to Uncle Pet [Nunley]?

Uncle Pet married to my Father's sister, Aunt Hattie Branch. That's how we got to be kin to Uncle Pet.

Was she the only girl?

Oh, no. There was Aunt Hattie and Aunt Sue and I guess that was all of my Dad's own sisters. And then there were his half-sisters like Mollie and Dolly.

They were half-sisters?

They were half-sisters to my Father. But Dad thought as much of them as he did his own sisters. Did you remember when we went to Aunt Mollie's? No, of course you don't, I was just a little kid. My Mama, oh we were just dressed out nice. We stopped in Jonesboro and bought our clothes. I bet by that time we were starting to look pretty seedy.

***I know my cheeks were as red
as roses and I know I had a
grin from ear to ear.***

And Mother had made me and Fairy each a new dress a piece, in the wagon. And so we stopped at Jonesboro and we got coats and fascinators and shoes and everything that we needed to put ourselves back up in trim. And we drove on out to Aunt Mollie's house, we put those clothes on. Drove out to Aunt Mollie's house and she was at the wood pile bringing in wood and Dad drove up and he said well he was passing through the country and he'd like to stop a few days with her if she didn't mind. Now I'm not just giving you all the right words but that's the gist of it. And she said, "Well I'm not in the habit of taking in strangers but" she says "if you've got your family along I think maybe it'll be all right". And Mama told me; she said, "Now you keep your mouth shut. Don't you say a thing." I was so tickled and I know my cheeks were as red as roses and I know I had a grin from ear to ear. And we got down

out of the wagon and Mollie picked up a load of wood and went on up and Dad got Bill and when we got to the porch he couldn't hold in any longer. And he said "Well Mollie, how are you?"

And she turned around and she looked at him and said, "Well, it's not Will, it's not Ed". She just kept thinking over the boys, you know. "It's not Leo" and, of course Uncle Bob was too young for it to be him. And she says, "Oh, Lordy, it's Allie" and when she said that she dropped that wood on the floor. She was just overcome. She hadn't heard from us in two or three years. People didn't write in that time. She didn't know but what Dad was dead. "Lord, she says it's Allie" and she dropped that wood on the floor and - I never will forget, she came in and she started to get dinner for us - we must have gotten there about eleven. And she got a big old half-gallon jar of huckleberries and turned it upside down in the teakettle to loosen the lid, and she made huckleberry pie. And that's one reason I'm so sensitive about huckleberry pie. Every time I go to the Ozarks, I ask about huckleberries. Even this year when I was down there I asked about huckleberries everywhere we went to eat.

And you know the people back there they have huckleberries and they are just so common they don't even think about making pies out of them. But Aunt Mollie made one and I thought that was the best thing I ever ate. Oh, she made a great big huckleberry pie; I don't know where she ever got such a big pan.

Canned huckleberries?

Canned huckleberries.

It was in the winter then wasn't it?

Oh, yeah, it was before Christmas.

18 – Christmas with Mollie

We stayed with Aunt Mollie, we stayed there about a week or maybe two weeks. Anyhow I know Dad went to town and bought provisions for groceries. She was a widow, living by herself with a load of kids. So when Christmas come, Dad had met up with Wallace, that was her step-son and Wallace was crying. He asked him what he was crying about and he said well he wanted some squibs [firecrackers] for Christmas but he knew they didn't have any money to get squibs. That's firecrackers. And so Dad went

to town and he come back with a meal sack over his shoulders from the store and he brought it in the house and stuck it under the bed.

And so I went in there and I felt of that sack and that was just when I found out who Santa Claus was. And I didn't want to believe it. And so when Christmas night come we were all sitting around the fire, they had the fireplace for heat. And so we were going to hang up our stockings and Aunt Mollie's children wouldn't hang up their stockings. They said there wasn't any money for Christmas. But when Christmas morning came, their little old stockings was hung up and they had had nuts in the toe of the stocking and then they had an orange and then candy and so on and a little gift tucked in the top of the stockings they all had and Wallace had his squibs.

Well when it got daylight, I got out and I went all around the house to see if I couldn't find some tracks that didn't belong to us. There ought to have been Santa Claus. I never told any of the kids that I knew who Santa Claus was. But it just made me so blue I could have cried.

A big disappointment! You use to tell...[interrupted]

Now Bessie and them said, the last time they made it that they still had that little gift whatever it was. Some little china doll or some little gift.

Imagine that!

Some little token.

Disk Two: Food on the Farm

1 - A Beautiful Dream

I'm going to start crying.

Well, if you cry we'll stop and I'll shut it off and start over.

Well, maybe I won't cry. Lately though, I cry so much. Well, it was just a dream. I dreamed that I was walking - to start out - walking down a street and all at once rocks and bricks from the corners of the building started falling around me. And I was frightened and so I ran down an alley and I come to a doorway and I go in it. The next thing I knew I was upstairs in a great big room. Arranged like a hall. [Apparently like a fair or show.] Booths here and there. Here and there, lots of beautiful things. Lot of dancing and lot of music and all of that and I was walking along and I said this is not for me. So I went on and the next thing I found myself out on the hillside. There were two paths, one was leading downward and one was leading up. So I choose the one that went up. I could see the sun over there behind the hill. And I was going towards the sun. So I went up but by the time I got to the top of the hill it was going

[The tape ended here and was rotated. The next part is a continuation of the dream.]

Oh and it was so pretty and the grass was the most beautiful green you ever saw. And this person took me by the hand and led me over to a little cottage. A little white cottage. And I went in and there was my father lying there. He looked well and healthy and all. And he said, "Well how is everybody at home, Onie?" When he said that I waked up.

I told it to Mrs. Lindsey. Oh, she said, that's beautiful, why don't you write it? Why don't you write that? And I didn't think anybody would want to read about that dream.

2 - Story Telling

Bruce and Edith came along I used to read to you all. And I'd run out of something to read and I thought well why worry about something to read.

Why I can tell them as good a story as anybody ever wrote. So I started out "Once upon a time there was a little girl" and then I told about a story in the covered wagon, you know. And the trip back to Virginia. And those kids would just stand there and jump up and down, "Read Mama, read!" And I'd be trying to think of what the next scene was and how we approached it and everything. They wanted me to read to them, they thought I was reading. But I was just telling them a story.

That's better than any story.

And those kids would just stand there and jump up and down, "Read Mama, read!"

"Read, Mama, read!" But I used to read to the kids. You remember. I do remember that one night I read Treasure Island to you and it was four o'clock in the morning when I finished the book. And every time we'd come to the end of a chapter, you'd say, "Well let's see what's in this next one Mom. Let's just see what's in this next one." So I'd be tempted to go ahead and read another chapter. First thing I knew, I'd read the book.

And you read that by lamplight?

Yeah, by lamplight. And every one of you was sitting around wide-eyed.

I'm sure we were. Can you remember when we used to sit and you read all the Tarzan books?

Yeah, you'd sit around the register and I'd read the Tarzan books.

You read all those Tarzan books. We thought they were really great.

Oh, yeah you kids loved them.

We did!

And I used to read the stories out of the Country Gentleman. They were good and there was one, the name of it was Fear and there was two men and one of them was so afraid of the other one. Something

had happened between them and this one was so afraid. So, Bruce was big enough to be in on that. And he'd sing and say, "Old man Bellum had a jug of rum and he kept it in a corner of the fence". So one day Elmer [Nall] came over here and Bruce was playing out there at the shade trees, where we had the shade trees. And Bruce was singing, "Old man Bellum had a jug of rum and he kept it in a corner of the fence". Elmer come up laughing and he says, "Well I see you all are reading the Country Gentleman, too".

He recognized that!

Yeah, he recognized Bruce's little song. "Old man Bellum had a jug of rum and he kept it in a corner of the fence!"

Didn't Edith do something like that?

Oh, Edith she did a worse one. I was reading The Virginian, I had read the Virginian and Grandma Paugh¹⁷ was here and so we were at the supper table and Edith was sitting almost right by Grandma. She was sitting by her Daddy down at the foot of the table. And Grandma was sitting next toward me. And all at once she burst out and she says, "Stand up on your legs you poor old cat and tell them you're a liar!" And, of course, Grandma was as deaf as I am, and she says, "Huh, What's that?"

You were glad she didn't hear, I suppose.

I don't know that I explained it to Grandma Paugh or not. I might have explained it to her because Grandma might have thought she'd been lying about something.

3 - Groundhogs, Possums and Other Meat

You know I remember one time when Grandma was here and Dad killed a possum and you cooked it and you told all of us we had to keep real still and you had it all cut up and on the platter. And you passed it to Grandma and said, "Won't you have some meat?" And she took it and ate it and nobody said it was possum, not a word. We just said meat.

I don't remember it.

¹⁷ Grandma Paugh was the mother of Herb Phelps' wife Mae Paugh. So Grandma Paugh's daughter was married to Iona Gander's son Herb.

I do.

She wouldn't eat rabbit.

Well, if she wouldn't eat rabbit, she certainly wouldn't have eaten possum.

No, she wouldn't have.

But you didn't tell her, you just - I can see it yet - you just said, "Would you have some meat?"

Well, if she wouldn't eat rabbit, she certainly wouldn't have eaten possum.

That's what we did one time when we cooked a groundhog over to Bill's.¹⁸ And Harve and Bill hunted and caught it. So Bill says, "Come over to my house and we'll have it for dinner." And I said well I don't know how to cook one. But Bill come and so I said to Hazel, I said you get it on and parboil it. That's the first step no matter what we do. You parboil it. So we put it in the oven and browned it. Oh it was a beautiful carcass. And here come Mr. Shade and Mr. Brimmer. Well, they must have smelled that good meat cooking. Because they set themselves down and we waited and waited for them to go home and they didn't go home. They just stayed and stayed. So Hazel says, "What'll we do?" And I said, "We're going to slice it and heap it up in nice pieces and we'll just put it on the table and invite them to dinner." And so we did. We fixed it and passed it around. And as you said, we just asked them "Would you have some meat?" Well they took great big pieces and ate it and they went back for seconds. We just figured that we'd put it over on them, but Dad says, "I bet you Mr. Brimmer and Mr. Shade knew what they were eating. I bet they knew what they were eating".

Groundhog, you know, in Virginia is a very rare dish. The southerners think that's something very special. And when we were back there in 1930, Harve and Uncle Will Davis¹⁹ worked a half a day trying to get

¹⁸ Bill Branch was Iona's brother. Bill and Hazel Branch lived nearby on land owned by Mr. Brimmer.

¹⁹ Will Davis was married to Iona's mother's sister Van Phelps and they lived in Abingdon, Virginia.

one. And they didn't get it because it was in a den under a big rock and they couldn't get to him. No Uncle Will wanted that groundhog so bad.

You scarcely ever see one anymore.

No, they're not plentiful around here. They used to be. You know one lived up here in the rocks, just above the old shop. In that crack in the hill. They used to catch my chickens, too. They caught a chicken one time. The caught a Leghorn hen and drug her in that crevice. I guess he ate her.

I didn't know they caught chickens.

I didn't either until that. I imagine he was a pretty hungry old fellow because they're vegetarians. They live off of grasses and they'll eat your garden up if they get started on it. They was eating my garden one summer. My lettuce was so pretty and I went out there and about half of that row of lettuce was gone. And I thought, well something's eating my lettuce. And I went back the next day and the rest of it was mowed down. So Harve was sitting out here on the porch and he saw that groundhog. He went from the garden to the woodpile where we had our wood stacks, you know, for sorghum making. And so Dad took his gun and went down there and shot the groundhog. And I bet his stomach was big enough, he had a gallon of lettuce in him.

Did you eat him?

No, no. We never ate any except real young ones. We used to, when we'd get a young one, we'd fry him. They were good.

Like chicken.

That one I cooked for Bill and Hazel was a mature groundhog, but that's the only one I ever cooked. I cooked the young ones, we cooked the young ones and they were nice to fry.

4 - String Beans, Apples

Aunt Fairy used to dry green beans.

Why my Mother used to do that.

How do you do that?

Well, now when Mama did it she would string them on a string and hang them up back of the stove until they dried.

Did she scald them first?

No. She just snapped them and strung them on a string and the heat from the cook stove while she was cooking would dry the beans out. They just shriveled up to little sticks and stems when they were dry.

How did she cook them?

Well you cook them in plenty of water, like you was cooking soup beans and boy they are good. I used to go home from town and I knew nobody in town knew what a string bean was. Mama said, well I don't know what to fix for your dinner. I said Oh give me some shoe string beans. We called them shoe string beans.

Because she strung them on a shoe string?

We strung them on a cord but we called them shoe string beans. And she would cook us up a mess and oh they are delicious.

Did you use bacon or a bone or something with them?

No, I don't remember Mama using a bone. But she did use bacon. Or a piece of shoulder. Something that had a little fat to it.

Meat rind or something of that sort.

And I just feasted! I didn't want anything else.

Well, I wanted to know that because Robin had thought maybe that that would be something the Indian children could learn to do, preserving food.

Their mothers could do well to learn to do it.

Yes, if they had some beans. But Robin was going to try it with cactus.

Cactus? What kind of cactus?

Prickly pear, the young prickly pear pads are quite a lot like green beans to eat.

Well, how do they get the thorns off of them?

Well, when they're real young, they don't have any.

Oh, they don't!

But you scrape them. When they first come out, the thorns aren't hard yet. And you just scrape it off and then slice it like green beans and cook it. And she had thought possibly you could dry them the way Grandma used to dry green beans.

Of course, Robin never knew Grandma.

But she's heard me talk about it and I didn't know how to do it.

Well, it's simple. But you really have to get them dry. And Mama would heat them before she'd sack them. She'd put them in a sack, a flour sack or something like that, and hang it up after she got them dry. But she would heat them to hot, they'd be hot to put your hand among them.

In the oven?

She'd heat them in the oven after they were dry before she'd sack them.

That would be to get rid of the weevil.

That would get rid of the eggs or anything. And she used to heat her dried apples the same way.

Well, now, when she dried apples, how did she do them?

She sun dried them. Put them out on the roof and let them dry.

Did she put anything with them then?

No.

And she didn't scald them ahead of time?

Oh No. Just skin them and slice them. And the less water you had in them the better, because they were going to be dried apples.

And they turned dark from drying. Now the evaporated apples are so pale they have no color. That's about what you get out of the store now.

Yes they're white.

But now after she dried them then, she didn't do anything else to them? Except sack them up?

She had to heat them.

She heated them?

Before she dried them - before she sacked them up.

To kill any eggs or weevil.

And then whenever you used out of the sack, you got to keep it tied up tight. Or they'll get in there, inside of everything. And they can soon ruin a sack of apples.

Now did she do corn the same way?

My mother? She cooked her corn, and then sliced it off the cob and set it out in the sun to dry.

She cooked it just a little while?

She cooked it long enough to set the milk.

Just in boiling water?

Yeah, she let them boil.

And then just set it out to dry?

Yeah, set it out on an old sheet or tablecloth or something like that. And then you have to go out and stir it ever so often. So that the bottom corn can come on top and so on. Why, you've seen me dry corn.

I know but just I've just sort of forgotten and I wanted to be sure how it's done.

Well, that's how it's done.

5 - Peach Leather, Egg Butter, Pumpkin Butter

Another thing, you used to talk about your mother making peach leather?

Well, my Mom never made it. It was her mother who used to make peach leather.

How's that made?

I don't know how it's made, I've never seen any. I've just heard Mother talk about it. They take the peaches though and mash them up and spread them out on a board. Set in the sun to dry. And when it came up, it just came up in a sheet. And she rolled it up like that and used it as a confection. In the winter when they all wanted something to eat, something mushy and good, why they'd get down the peach leather. Just take a knife and cut it off in strips and hand it around to every one.

They didn't put sugar or anything?

No, they didn't put sugar on it.

Peach Leather

Peach Leather was a dried peach confection used long before canning was in common practice. I'm told that the method was brought from Africa by early slaves and Peach Leather was made by Negro mammies in the South before it spread to other parts of the country.

"In order to obtain the best results very soft peaches are used for Peach Leather, ripe to perfection, but not over-ripe. Wipe peaches off, seed and mash them to a smooth pulp, spread thin on platters and set in the sun. This should be well protected by fine mosquito bar from flies.

"When one side is dried to a slight brown, turn it with a knife so the other side will dry. Two or three days during the sunniest hours will complete the drying. The leather is then sprinkled with brown sugar, rolled up, wrapped in paper and placed in stone jars and covered closely. For serving, it is sliced through the roll."

Mrs. Lorin Best

R. I., Box 128A

Mission, Texas

(Reprinted from Capper's Weekly)

Just mashed up the peaches?

Yes,

And dried on a board.

They rolled it up in rolls. I imagine they had to heat it up, and you have to heat anything if you want to keep away from the weevils. My Mom didn't mention it, but I know that you'd have to do it.

Well, I thought maybe you'd made that.

No I never did get around to making it. In fact, peaches are kind of hard to do anything with, they're so watery. I've tried to dry peaches and they always went bad on me before I could get them dry. They just don't dry down here.

With peach leather, you'd have to have ripe peaches, wouldn't you?

Yeah, they'd have to be ripe.

That's interesting.

Oh, that takes us a long ways back. A long ways back in history.

What were some of the other things you used to make? Can you remember any of the other things special foods that you'd make? Now you talked about egg butter. How did you make egg butter?

Well, you put a cup of sorghum in the skillet, or a couple of cups of sorghum, and let it gradually get hot. Then you'd take three or four eggs and stir in then you add spices, whatever is your favorite spice. We usually used cinnamon or cloves or both. And nutmeg's awful good in egg butter, too. Nutmeg and cinnamon makes a good flavor for egg butter. And when it kind of clabbers in the skillet, it's done.

You beat the eggs into the hot sorghum and add the spice?

Yeah.

Did you seal that up in jars or put it in a mold?

No, we just cooked what we wanted to eat.

Now, a long time ago, when we didn't have fruit, you used to make pumpkin butter.

Oh, yeah.

How do you make that?

Just like apple butter. Cook the pumpkins until they are tender and drain all the water off that you can get. Pumpkins are nearly all water, you think. You get it all off, and then you mash them up with a potato masher until it is just a pulp. And you add your sorghum to them and the spices and stick it back in the oven and cook it until it's thick.

You used sorghum rather than sugar?

I don't suppose you can make pumpkin butter with sugar. We made it with sorghum all the time.

Did you use equal parts?

No, that would be too much sorghum. Just enough to make them good and sweet. I think we just put our sorghum in there by guess. That's always come out alright.

But that you could seal up and keep?

Oh, yes, I've kept it for several years. Dad liked it so well, we'd raise a big batch of pumpkins and about February they'd begin to go soft so we'd have to work them up. And I'd make four or five batches of pumpkin butter. Put it in a half-gallon jar because when we opened one it didn't last long.

Did you make it with squash, like the crook necked

Egg Butter or Backwoods Preserves

When fruits for preserves were scarce in early days, many a family enjoyed Egg Butter. My grandma lived to be one hundred years old. This is her recipe.

"Bring to boil one pint of sorghum. Have ready two well-beaten eggs. Add a bit of nutmeg or cinnamon to the sorghum and stir in the eggs, stirring constantly until thickened, which won't be long. As it boils up, add a small pinch of soda as it will cut the too strong taste of the sorghum."

Mrs. Ed Jarvis
1030 Lawrence St.
Topeka, Kan.

squash?

No, I never tried putting a squash in it, but I know you could. The squash don't turn off [make a batch] as fast as a big old pumpkin.

No it wouldn't. I can remember that I liked it so much but I couldn't remember how to do it.

I was cooking pumpkin butter when Margaret Fahy came out to visit me one time. It was in the fall, but then we had the pumpkins and I wanted to save them. And Margaret sat down to eat and she said oh this tastes like peaches, it tastes like peach butter, she liked it. But now, my Mother used to make it, and she'd make it stiff enough that she could pour it in a five gallon jar and just tie a cloth over the top of it. And when she wanted to use some of it, she could slice it and take it out in slices. And when we kids

would be hungry she'd go get us that pumpkin butter. We'd make a sandwich.

In a slice?

Yes, just slice it up. I never did make it that thick, cause we didn't need to. We had the use of good jars to put it in. But at that time the jars were all so faulty.

And so you just sealed it up.

6 - Sauerkraut

Another thing you used to make, you used to always make Sauerkraut in a ten-gallon jar. Do you remember how you did that?

Oh, there's nothing to it.

Well, yes it seems to me that there is because you kept it in the jar.

Now I had to cut all my cabbage by hand. I chopped it with a tin chopper. And you use the salt at the rate of a teaspoonful to a gallon. You salt it and then you put it in a jar and you press it down until the juice raises over the top of the cabbage. And then you put some extra - when you've got the jar full - you put some extra cabbage leaves on top.

Big leaves?

Yeah, big leaves. Put you a cloth over it and then put your weight on there and weight it down with -don't use a limestone rock cause the lime will keep the cabbage from fermenting - but get you a flint or some other kind, or even a brick. Put it on there as a weight. You know as they ferment, they'll raise and then go down, up and down. So you want something that will hold it down. And then we ate it right out of the jar, we didn't can it. But in later years we canned it. Because we just didn't want the open mouthed jar sitting around any more.

How long did it take then, before you had sauerkraut?

Oh, not too long, I imagine about a month.

A month.

We used to, in order to keep it, I would can it up and pack it in jars and seal it. And then it would keep a long long time. But in an open mouthed jar the cabbage is exposed to the air and you would have

to be using on it all the time or you'll have to take off the top and discard. So, so much of it is going to spoil. Just go soft.

One year I made three ten-gallon jars of kraut. And we had cabbage that was so fine, it was raised right here on the lawn. Ten heads would make a ten-gallon jar full of kraut. And so I just made kraut and made kraut and made kraut and I said to Dad well I don't know what to do with this cabbage and he said, well let's make some more kraut. And I said you'll have to go to town and buy me some more jars,

which didn't cost much. And you know I sold that kraut out to the neighbors.

You did? For how much?

A quarter a gallon, I think.

A quarter a gallon, you probably made all of two dollars!

I don't think I made anything but anyway the cabbage didn't go to waste.

To Mother
My Dearest Mother.
There could be no other.
That could fix sloppy P'taters.
And good breaded T. Maters.
You make such good Pie.
You are the apple of my eye.
You can make hot pan cakes.
A boy will eat till his belly aches.
And oooh your corn bread.
But maybe enough has said.
If I don't stop this corn
You might wish I never born.
Wishing you love and Joy
I am your blue eyed Boy
Love to Mother
Cliff and family

To Mother

My Dearest Mother

There could be no other

That could fix sloppy P'taters

And good breaded T'Maters

You make such good pie

You are the apple of my eye

You can make hot pan cakes

A boy will eat till his belly aches

And oooh your corn bread,

But maybe enough been said.

If I don't stop this corn

You might wish I never born.

Wishing you love and Joy

I am your blue eyed boy

Love to Mother

Cliff and family

Poem written by Cliff Gander to his mother about her good cooking. Since it is signed "Cliff and family" it was probably written about 1940.

Green tomato Pickles
Slice tomatoes $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ in.
thick. I prefer the thicker
slices let stand in salt water
over night. Drain.
make a Syrup of
2 cups sugar
1 cup vinegar double
this according to amount
of pickles.
Add stick cinnamon bring
to a boil. drop in a few
slices of tomato and cook
till transparent but not too
long as they will get soft
place in jars not too full
and pour over the hot
thick Syrup & Seal.

Handwritten recipe by Iona Hope Branch Gander

7 – Yeast and Bread Making

Yeah, we had three of those, you remember when we had those big ten-gallon jars.

I can remember the jars , there's one of them in the basement yet.

Yeah, it's broke.

Well, I mended it though.

You didn't mend it.

Yes I did, it's down there I'm going to take it home some day. Well I glued that all up with epoxy. You could make kraut in it now.

Well we used it to keep lard. I used it for lard. I....

Almost a hole got knocked in it somehow.

Well I mended it anyway. So it's a good jar, I didn't want it to be thrown away.

Well, I was going to break it up and take it out piece by piece.

I know you were, but I didn't let you.

Last time that jar was up it was on the back porch full of lard and it was turning cold and oh it was going to be bitter cold that night and frozen lard will burst a jar. So I knew my jar was going to go if I didn't get it to the cellar. And Bruce come in and I told him about it. And he laid that jar down on its side and rolled it from the porch to the cellar door. And then he took it on down in the cellar. It's the first time I'd seen a batch of lard taken to the cellar like that.

Another thing I want to know is how you used to make your yeast for bread.

Oh, now you're just getting clear out of your sphere!

No I'm not!

But I can't remember! No I couldn't give you a recipe for bread. Mary Gander²⁰ and I have talked about that and talked about it. And if we were younger we'd get together and make some yeast to see if we knew how.

But you actually made it right from..

Yeah, we made our own yeast. We always had a little starter batch. And when we made our batch of yeast, that we would divide between us, we would

have this starter and get everything ready and add the starter to it. Put it out and well we added corn meal to it after we put the starter in. Corn meal enough to make it crumbly and then we'd spread it out in the sun and let it dry. When it got dry we'd put it in glass jars with a seal. Then when you wanted to make bread, you take a half a cup of that to start it with yeast. And put your water in, whatever you were going to use as water, potato water and so on and set it the night before and the next morning you'd wake up and make your bread. You had your own bread with your own yeast.

Well, now after that though, when we used to bake bread all the time you always took out a starter and put it back.

But that was after we quit making yeast. Just kept it back from the dough.

You kept that out of the sponge. How much?

Oh, I'd say a half a cup. Half a cup and I'd put it in a pint jar and covered it with sugar.

No water?

No, I didn't add any water to it. I had added water to it when I set my dough, to raise it over night. I added water then but we didn't add any water after that.

So then you'd take out a half a cup of the batter and put how much sugar?

Oh, I never measured it.

A few tablespoons full?

A few tablespoons full would be a plenty.

You didn't have to keep it in the refrigerator.

No, but I'll tell you how we kept it was in the summer. We didn't try to keep it in the winter. I'd bake one day and send the yeast up to Oneta's and she'd bake the next day and send it back down here. That way we always had good yeast and good bread. That's what that yeast is good for, to be used between members, back and forth.

But if you kept it in the refrigerator it would keep quite a while.

If you keep it too long it dies. Got to have some action.

²⁰ Mary Gander was the wife of Harve Gander's brother Rob.

Well that's the reason you keep baking though.

If you keep on baking you can keep it going all the time. I bet ?? has that. I bet she does.

She would have. She got it from you?

No, she never got it from me. But people got it from her. It's got a different flavor from the bought yeast.

Oh, it made beautiful, beautiful bread. Remember those eight loaves you used to make?

I used to make eight loaves twice a week.

Twice a week?

You always were big eaters.

Well we worked hard and there was a lot of us. And we had to carry lunches to school.

I don't know what I fixed for your lunch, I bet you had the sorriest ones of any kids in school.

I don't think so. One of the things I can remember that I used to always like though were the damson preserves. On that bread. Oh, I loved damson preserves.

I've got a couple quarts of damsons in the basement.

You have!

Just canned.

If I'd known that I would have made jam out of them.

Oh, they may be there when you come back.

Well, I'll make some jam then, because I do love it.

Damson makes such good pies. When I canned them I thought well we'll have a pie or a cobbler out of these. I haven't got them made yet. They're about two years old.

I didn't know they were down there or I would have made you a pie. You remember when I was here last winter I made up all those old canned blackberries into pies and we ate them like pigs.

I don't think we ate like pigs.

8 - Green Tomato Pie

Can you remember how you made the green tomato pickles?

Well you make them just like you do a ripe peach pickle. Only you slice your tomatoes and let them stand a while. About that thick a slice.

About a half an inch.

And then you have your vinegar and cinnamon and sugar on cooking and you drop the tomatoes in there and cook it until it's transparent. Lift it out with a fork and put it in your jar and put some water in there.

You have to use very green tomatoes.

Yeah, that's green tomatoes. When they're small, about that size, you can fix them whole.

You can pickle them whole.

How did you make a green tomato pie?

Oh, I sliced the tomatoes just like you would a - make it just like you would an apple pie. Just make up your mind you're making an apple pie. Just slice your tomatoes real thin. And then you place those little slices around in there and add a little sugar and spices to it, nutmeg is good for it. And then a dollop of butter and put the top crust on it and put it in and bake it. Just like you were making an apple pie.

And you want real green tomatoes for that.

Remember when - Alfred just loved those. I made some green tomato pies for him once when Edith lived on West Piper. And oh he did love them. Now here we made them often because we didn't have any fruit.

I know you did. And we all liked them.

You remember we went to the fair one time and we took down fried chicken and everything along and I made green tomato pies. So we'd have our green tomato pie. And Bea White was with us and so she took her piece of pie and she says, "What kind of pie is this?" And someone says "Green Tomato" and she threw it away. She never tasted it. She'd never seen a green tomato pie. And so she just threw it away.

Poor girl, she's dead. Those kids are all dead now but Ola and Russell and Lorene. Well, I don't know

where Russell and Lorene are. Ola's married again and she's living in California now.

9 - The Nicest Girl in the County

I can remember one time I was telling Dad one time about Vilas and all and I said, "We ought to have stayed out there. We'd probably be well to do by now." Harve said, "I'm glad you didn't." He said, "I wouldn't have ever known you. I'm glad you didn't stay out there."

Then he couldn't have married the prettiest girl in Monroe City.



Iona Hope Branch as a young woman.

No he couldn't have. The Preacher said the nicest one. I didn't tell Harve that I belonged to the Methodist church at Monroe. I don't know why I didn't. He belonged at Sharpsburg. But he says, "What are you wanting, do you want a preacher to get married?" And I said, "Yes, I want a preacher". I didn't say who to get. And so he went to Brother

Crowe and he didn't know that Brother Crowe knew me. So he told Brother Crowe he wanted us to get married. He said, "Who are you going to marry?". And he told him. "Why", he says, "that's the nicest girl in this County!"

He thought Daddy was pretty lucky!

Yes, he thought Daddy was lucky. He says "Why, that's the nicest girl in this city or in this town". He didn't say city, he said town.

Well you knew Daddy though when you were real young didn't you?

Oh yes, we played together, why we even jumped rope when we were kids. A couple of kids would come over, you know, and they had nothing to do, no place to go. And they had a ball field up on Pee Dee and the big boys would go up there and play ball. Then the kids like us, we'd kind of hang out and jump rope and do all kinds of little stunts like that. On a Sunday afternoon. It was nice.

Why certainly.

And so yes we played together and jumped rope and Harve was just a little bashful boy and I was a bashful little girl. We could jump rope all right.

Well one time my Dad decided to whip me. Only once did he ever try to whip me. And that was the year that Alfred [Branch] was born. You know today's Alfred's birthday, the sixth.

Oh, we ought to go call him, let's do.

So we had just moved into that new house, that little log house and Dad was just clearing some ground for crops. And Mama was in bed sick with chills and that baby was due. Well I knew she was going to have a baby but I never let on. But her fevers were running so high she didn't know what was going on. And that morning I did some washing. Now I felt like I washed. I don't know whether I did half of the wash or part of the wash or what, but I did wash. And when I got through I washed the kitchen windows. I thought they looked dingy and I washed them.

All at once I realized it was getting dinnertime and Dad would be home wanting his dinner. And he'd be wanting to eat it quick and go right back. So I started stirring up the fire in the cook stove and I said to Fairy, I said, "Set the table Fairy". I knew if

Dad come in and find the table even halfway set he wouldn't complain. He'd sit there and rest until we got the meal ready. But she says no, she wouldn't set the table. And she started up - we had a little open stairway then - wasn't closed in - she started up the stairway and I pinched her on the leg. And boy she let out a whoop just like I'd murdered her and just about that time Dad came in the back door and he said, "What's the matter?" "Onie pinched me!" Well, he says, "I'll teach Onie how to pinch you". So he went and got a little keen switch and, the house was set square to the world like all old people set them, and I'd been jumping rope. So I happened to be standing right in front of that door and it was open. And every time that switch would come down I just jumped it as slick as you please. Dad kept hitting at my bare legs and he never got a lick in, not one. And so he got tickled and he got out and says, "Onie I couldn't whip you" and he got up and mocked me. He'd jump like I did. Well he never did - I can't remember him ever offering to whip me except that one time. And one time he sent me away from the breakfast table because I forgot to wash my face and hands. I got up that morning and somehow, Mom always had me set the table and I forgot to wash. I set the table and we all come to the breakfast table, but washing was a thing in our family and everybody had to be washed. There was no skipping it. All the kids had to be washed.

It used to be that way with us.

If one of the kids hadn't washed, he'd get them up to the pan and wash them himself. He was just that particular, you know. He said, "Did you wash?" to me and I said no. "Well", he said, "leave the table". And I left it.

Don't you remember Daddy used to send us away from the table if we didn't wash?

Well I know he didn't - you had to wash.

He wouldn't put up with any of that nonsense.

And if we went to bed without washing our feet we had to get up and go wash our feet, too.

Yes sir, you couldn't go to bed with old muddy feet.

And you didn't come to the table without washing your face and combing your hair.

And now you see so many people, even grownups, that don't wash. You just wonder how on earth they can stand themselves?



The home of Harve and Iona Gander.

10 - Moving to the New Farm

But when spring come, we sold eggs by the bushel. Hundred and forty dozen in one trip to Warren. That was eggs!

You must have had a lot of hens.

I had three hundred. I brought three hundred down here.

What time of the year, when did we come down here?

Oh, just before Thanksgiving.

Before Thanksgiving.

Yes. In 1912.

How many wagons did we have?

Oh, Dad had already brought some loads of stuff down. We didn't count the wagons. But I think there were three wagons come the day we moved. The day we brought our household and things like that. But Dad went back and got more that spring. He went back and got his farming tools and he brought three hundred quarts of canned stuff and a barrel of vinegar I had.

And the sawdust.

And you remember we packed it in sawdust. And you said, "I'm so glad we're going to move" and you were just teetering on the edge of the wagon and you fell into it and got your mouth full of sawdust.

That was the next day after we moved in. And I just don't see how they put up with us that first night.

Why?

Well, they hadn't broke up housekeeping or nothing. And we just come down here with our loads of furniture. And as they took theirs out we set ours in. And they moved over on the old - what we used to call the Grange. Where grange used to live. Well they moved into that for the winter. And they bought this old Smith place on Route C. That old house that stands fairly close to the road. It's got all the windows out now and it's just ready to fall down. But they had bought that place when they sold us this. Called the old Smith place. They lived over there until after Russell was born, and it was in March. And they moved on to the other place. But I just can't figure out now how we got ourselves in and they got themselves out. And of course there was Harve and Herbert and I and you. Grandma wasn't with us then but she come pretty shortly after we got moved. And I don't know whether she was in Shelby County or whether she was already down here [in Marion county] but she didn't come down with us. But she was here.

She was here. Who did Tom²¹ [White] buy this place from?

I think it was from Collison. It was cut over country. You know all the good timber was cut off of the hills and bottom and everywhere. Lumber was sent - I guess it was shipped out.

Well Dad used to work at a sawmill up here.

Well that was just a local.

It wasn't Collison?

No, it was a big company and people come in here and there were little shacks here. That's why you see so many shacks; they were lumber workers or timber workers. And they come in here and worked as long as there was any timber to cut.

²¹ Tom White was Harve's half-brother.

11 - Clothes

Now I don't know what happened to Grandma Gander's bible. Different ones say she had a bible but I never saw it. Now I'm the one that emptied her house. We've got sticks of old furniture sticking around here yet that was hers. I don't know if it's any good. Grandma, most of her stuff was homemade. She had - remember that big clothes box that we had in the little bedroom that I even had Dad's suit folded down in there. I didn't have anyplace to put it.

Yes, I remember that.

Well, that and then that old cook table, and that old cook table was homemade and the legs wasn't even the same length. Now Harvey wanted it and so we let Harvey have it and he took up there and they had it in the smokehouse as a kind of little table, you know. If he wanted a slice of ham or something, he's got something to work on. But Sue let the kids take the table out and play with it in the playhouse and it fell apart.

And then the flour bin, you remember that old flour bin?

No, I don't remember that.

Well, it was about that wide and stood about that high and there was a top like that and you raised it back and your biscuit board and rolling board were down in there where you get the flour.

And then you put those on the cook table to roll out your biscuits.

Yeah.

No, I don't remember the flour bin.

Well, most of the stuff we had from Grandma was old, it was home made. And now that little old lady, I bet she didn't pay three dollars for it. Just old cheap wood.

Well, now was the walnut bed that's in the attic, was that hers?

Yes, that was Grandma's and the old table and that little stand ??? in the hall.

And the old safe and the kitchen cabinets.

And the old cupboard.

The kitchen cabinets and the safe.

No, the kitchen cabinets belonged to Mrs. Perry. We bought that.

Oh, that belonged to Mrs. Perry.

We paid her \$14 for that. I remember what Harve gave for it.

Oh, I see.

It was just the old safe, that was the only thing – and there was such a thing as a curtain box. We had those things in those days. It was a box with a bunch of shelves and then a curtain in front. We used to call them a curtain box. They looked nice if you had a pretty piece of print to make a curtain.

You used that to fold your clothes on. That's where you put your clothes and towels and sheets and so on.

I don't know where we – we didn't have enough clothes to worry about.

Well, you had underwear and socks.

And towels, you'd pull them off and wash them and put them right back on.

I know we didn't have many. I know we didn't have many.

No we didn't. But we made it do. We always made it do. And you were always neat.

I used to think we were very well dressed. We always had Sunday clothes.

For the time being we were well dressed.

We always had a Sunday dress to dress up in.

I remember now, when my Mother died and I wanted something new and I thought I ought to wear black. So Harve says, what do you want from town? He was going in. I said, "get me a black skirt and a white blouse." And you know he done it! He went in there and I don't know what else he bought, but he bought a number of things that he thought we would need. But I could a wore what I had.

I can remember that you wore black veils, you and Aunt Fairy.

Yeah, black voile. I sent and got the yard goods and made one for Fairy's hat and one for my hat. The veil hung down in front, don't you know.

I can remember those.

Well, people used to wear them. And years later Fairy said to me, "I wonder if we should have wore those veils?" And I said, well, I said other people wore them and it seemed to be the thing.

Well, Mrs. [John F.] Kennedy wore a veil when the President was assassinated.

I thought about that when I saw her picture on the TV with the veil on. I thought, well we wasn't out of style, we probably was leading in style according to that.

No they used to always wear them.

Well, I think they always wore them.

12 – Kids, Lambs and Cows

In 1920. But we was living in the old house, it was about 1917. Harvey got up one morning and dressed himself and I had made him the cutest little blue suit. A collarless jacket but it had little pockets. I didn't have goods for a collar but I had enough for pockets. So I put those pockets on. He would dress in that little suit and stick his little hands down in the pockets and go out the kitchen door and look up at the sky and say "Howdy God" and then go on around the house a little ways around the corner and say "Howdy bad man". I'd say he'd sure make a good diplomat.

He found the good side of both.

He didn't seem to be any worry or anything like that. He just looked so cheerful when he'd speak to God, "Howdy God". "Howdy bad man."

Oh, I used to get a lot of fun out of you kids. Just like Clifford, and Cliff would go out and he'd play and he just played all day long by himself. Sometimes he got lonely and he'd cry. He'd be crying and I'd say, "What's the matter Cliff?" "Oh, my leeeeg hurrrrrts!" And I'd rub his leg and pretty soon he'd be just all right. It didn't hurt any more. He just needed a little attention. That's all that was the matter with him.

I don't know how you ever managed to do all of the things that you did.

I don't know how I did it either.

You look back on it, because you raised the garden.

I raised the chickens.

You raised the chickens. You canned, you sewed and you had to do everything the hard way. And you did so much of it!

One time I just felt like crying. The first spring after we moved down here – that was in the old house – we had sheep and lambs and the sheep weren't giving milk very good. So I had four or five lambs I was trying to feed. Pearl White²² called me up one morning and she said, "What are you doing?" I said, "I've been feeding the lambs." She said, oh she said, "We've got our washing out already." And I thought, "Well, my lands!" I had too many things to do to even think about a washing. Just made me almost sick to think, here they were with the washing on the line and I had just come in from feeding the lambs. But I fed them. We had nice lambs and

You know we used to wax the little corners. We didn't let so many things get by and go to waste.

Dad sold them right off the sheep at the end of the summer. We didn't used to keep them over. He'd sell them and we got such a good price for them.

You know we used to wax the little corners. We didn't let so many things get by and go to waste.

You couldn't let things go to waste.

No, you couldn't. You had to save everything. You always, if a cow or horse or something like that died, you always skinned them and sold the hide. Now you can't give the hides away.

No

You can't give them away. But I know when old ??? died, and Dad found him, he skinned him and he got \$11 for the hide. I know Dad come home – and now he'd lost his horse, one of his best horses – but

he got \$11 for the hide. Now he was just real pleased that he could get that much for the hide.

Yes they used to sell them, always sell them. Every cow and

Yeah.

And you know, I can remember when for example I remember when we had a cow that broke her leg. And Dad killed her and dressed her. And do you remember he put the meat in the spring wagon and you covered it up with a sheet. And he went around and peddled it out.

Yeah. It was more than we could use in the spring. And he sold that meat all out before he got home.

He just drove around and peddled it out. It was in the spring and beef was a treat. It was just, I guess, an old milk cow.

No, I don't think she was a milk cow. Dad had bought some cattle. He was going to try raising calves, you know, and sell the calves off the cow. He bought a bunch of cattle from Sam Sandifer²³, and that was one of them. And then pasture got short and he took those cows over on the Fabius [river] and put them on pasture over there. Now I don't know whose farm it was, but Brook Smallwood was living there. On the Fabius bottom. He turned those cattle out over there and run them all summer. It was a wet year and so I don't think we got any corn out and especially on the Fabius, the Fabius always floods so much. And I remember Dad finally got discouraged and sold that bunch of cattle and said why they'd soon just eat themselves up. It cost so much for the pasture. But it was one of those beef cattle.

But anyway it had a broken leg or something.

Well, she just broke it

And of course he sold the hide besides. But to us, you know, fresh beef was a real treat.

13 – The Hail Storm

Oh, I had Miss Bell Jones so mad at me. I think she put the price up on my hats. It was Easter time and I

²² Pearl White was the wife of Harve Gander's half-brother Tom White. Harve and Iona bought their farm from Tom and Pearl White.

²³ Sam Sandifer was married to Harve Gander's sister Paulina "Pliny".

went into town to get you and Edith a hat and I also bought myself one. And Miss Bell was one of these little old ladies and she says, "Oh how are you dear lady? How are you dear?"

I said, "Well I had some bad luck last night". She said, "Oh, what happened?" I said, "I had twenty chickens to smother". She said, "What'd you do with them?" I said, "We carried them over and threw them on a brush pile". And she just almost fainted. She said, "Well the idea! Just think of all the good eating that you threw over there on the brush pile". Oh she went for me.

Do you remember the time the hail killed all of them and you dressed those.



Picture of Iona Gander's chickens around 1930.

I kept them and we ate them. We didn't have wood to scald them and we skinned them.

We gathered up hail and...

Made ice cream.

Well we iced the chickens with hail. There was so much hail on the ground.

We filled that old refrigerator just chock full of ice, of that ice, and then put the chickens in there at the end of the week, that was the first of the week and so I said, come and have dinner with us. We'll have fried chicken and ice cream. Oh good. So they were here. I don't think they'll ever forget it. We fried up a bunch of those nice chickens

Well they were so little.

I just split them down the back. There was half a chicken per person. But that was awful good chicken.

Oh they were delicious.

But you must have lost - how many did you lose?

Oh I think there were twenty-four or something like that.

We lost a lot of them.

They just blew up along the fence and they couldn't get away from the fence. And the hail and the rain just beat them and drowned them. And we went down there, the chickens that had got in the coop were all right. Some of them was wet but then they weren't drowned. They made it all right. But those that the wind blew them and they couldn't get back to the coop cause the wind was just pushing them along the fence, you know. And they couldn't get away from that fence. If the fence hadn't been there, it's hard to say where they would have wound up. Cause that was a terrible storm. Well the water was ??? deep out here in the yard. Water and hail. The hail held the water back. I went out, it was later than that it was after I dressed the chickens. I went out and scooped up the hail in buckets and we brought it in and put it in the refrigerator.

Now they must have been awfully big hail storms.

Well, they were. It stripped all the fruit off the trees and cherries off the cherry tree and the ground was red with cherries. And the gooseberries were beat off the vine and there was just no gooseberries left. There just wasn't anything left. And our corn was up about knee high.

And the hay was beat down. I can remember the hay. And the [sugar] cane.

And the wheat.

It just went flat. And Dad had cane out and it went flat.

Well, it didn't hurt the cane, it was still small. It straightened up.

I can remember walking the field with him after that storm was over.

14 - Uncle Ed Branch

You know that was right after Uncle Ed [Branch] died. That was in '26.

It was '27.

'27?

'27.

'27. I didn't remember. I was thinking it was '26. But it was in June.

Along about the 10th. On that one, when that storm hit us Uncle Ed was in the bed. And he'd been awake all night and Harve and Alfred sat up with him. And they said he talked just like a well person; that his voice wasn't weak at all. And when this storm come up he said to Harve, "It's coming up a big one, ain't it Harve? It's coming up a big one." And Harve said, yes it was. So I was upstairs asleep and I heard the storm coming. So I got up and went downstairs, and Uncle Ed didn't have a bedcover on. He was cold. And I said, "Well, Uncle Ed, aren't you cold?" "Yes, I'm cold", he said. So I put a comforter on him and he said, "You're worth more than all the men in the world." And he was dying right then, but I didn't realize it. I got some lotion and I bathed his head because he seemed to be all



Ed Branch and Matilda "Jimmer" Lilly Branch. Jimmer was a daughter of Hardy Lilly and Sarah Emeline "Aunt Em" Kestner Lilly.

stopped up in his chest, you know. But it was just the death rattle. He died before that storm was over.

The hail storm?

Yes. He died before it was over. You remember how the ...

But that wasn't the time the chickens were killed though.

Yes it was.

No, it wasn't. You wouldn't have had time.

We were having a storm that morning but that was just a big old rain storm.

And wind

But that wasn't when we had the hail storm.

Did it hail that morning?

No it just rained. The hail storm was later. Because you wouldn't have been able to have all these chickens on ice and everything.

Well, no I wouldn't have. That's right. Because I'd have had a patient on my hands.

We didn't have the hail storm that day.



Bringing Uncle Ed's coffin out of the Gander home.

Well we had it just right after that.

It may have come later.

I bet it was just a week after that.

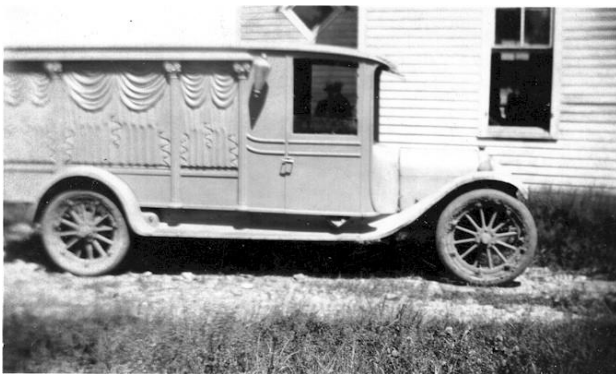
It might have been.

The storms were just right there together. And I was trying to get my housecleaning straightened up and everything like that and I'd been going over to Uncle Ed's to wait on him. And when Alfred [Branch] called me from Mayo's and said to meet him at Hannibal, I said to Dad, "Well we're not taking him

home. We might go by there but we're taking him right back to my home". So he can just use our room. So when we brought down Uncle Ed, he was so weak, he was in a wheelchair. I wanted to stop and get him some milk along the road. But Uncle Ed wanted to come right on home. So we got down to his house. I said, "Well Uncle Ed is there anything you want from the house? We're taking you home with us". He said no. There wasn't nothing he wanted. So we brought him on here and he died in a few weeks. Just about two weeks.

About two

But he died that morning of that storm.



The Ford Model T hearse that came for the coffin.

Yeah the river came out after the storm.

Oh, I guess it did.

I remember the river came out, but that wasn't when we had the hail storm, the hail storm came later.

It might have, maybe I just got mixed up on that. I wouldn't have had a chance to have skinned all those chickens.

No, and picked up all the hail and all that kind of thing.

Anyhow I just got the hail. It lasted, you know it just formed a solid cake in the icebox. And that was a big old ice compartment where I put the hail. It just formed a solid cake. Well that was a big old icebox. I was glad when I got rid of it. It just looked so terrible.

That was the old oak one.

Yes, that was the old oak one.

15 - Sunday Mornings

We observed Sunday though we didn't go to church. We had no way to go other than on the big wagon and part of the time we didn't own a big wagon. And we'd get up on Sunday morning; everybody washed up and combed their hair and fixed themselves up and you put on your best clothes. If you were going to church you put on your VERY best, otherwise you put on your best. And it's a custom and that same thing I told you about Grandma and Grandpa [Branch] I've told the kids about their great-great-grandmother and grandpa and they had on their Sunday best. So when Sunday morning would come why they would put on their best clothes. And no matter who come or what happened why it was Sunday. And same way with us at home, when we grew up. And we had to eat cornbread so much, but we had biscuits for Sunday morning breakfast. Now that was something. And that was worth washing your face for. And combing your hair. You could have biscuits for Sunday morning breakfast. We'd eat cornbread because cornmeal was easier to get than flour.

I imagine you had your own ground, didn't you?

We took wheat, when we had good luck with our wheat we'd take it to town and put it in a mill and they'd grind it and give us credit it for it, you know. And then we'd just go get a package of flour as we needed it. And they kept it there.

What about the cornmeal?

Well we got our cornmeal ground out there.

The same way.

Oh, I've taken cornbread to school a lots of times when I didn't have a biscuit. And Mom never tried to make light bread in the winter because she wasn't use to the yeast that we have. When she made light bread, she made salt-rising. And it was good but it never got big and puffy like yeast biscuits or yeast light bread. And -

Well you probably had some pretty rough times after Grandpa died.

Oh, well, we had rough times before Dad died because he - a man, if he got 50 cents a day it was good wages - and he had five children to feed and support. That doesn't mean anything. You had to stretch it. But we could buy coffee for ten cents a

pound and a pair of shoes maybe for a dollar and a half. But just think how much work you had to do to shoe a family. Yes, I remember buying myself a pair of shoes and I got there and I paid a dollar and forty cents for them. But you had to order them now, you couldn't get them at home from your home merchant. You had to order them. That's when we started ordering things from Montgomery Wards and Sears Roebuck catalogs. And we could get them real cheap.

Well those mail-order companies were very new then.

Yeah, they were new, but they were doing a big business.

Now Mrs. Buckwalter²⁴, when she come here, she bought all her household furniture from her savings

from working out as a maid and they bought their groceries from Sears Roebuck or Montgomery Ward and they'd order a large quantity of whatever they wanted of staples. Now we never did buy groceries but we had considered it. But it seemed like you had to buy so much, you know. A bag of beans is a bag of beans, they wouldn't sell you a half a bag, or anything like that. You had to take a whole bag. It just looked like a little too much for us to order. But they did. They ordered them that way. And they had a big family [ten children] and the boys grew up and they took more and more so they got rid of all of it and saved money, too.



About 1918. The three oldest children of Harve and Iona Gander: Harvey age four, Cliff age two and Jackie age eight.

²⁴ Harriet Buckwalter stayed with Iona for about seven years before Iona died. Harriet was only a couple of years younger but was in better health and was able to care for Iona. Harriet and her husband were both from Lancaster, Pennsylvania originally.

May 18-28.

Dear Clifford-

What can I write?

You are planning to keep this
I know. I am proud of you,
my Boy. I hope you will grow
to manhood, as manly and
good as you are in Boyhood.
Think always before you act and
let conscience be your guide.
Trust in the Lord and you will
make very few mistakes. Lovingly,
Mother.

May 18, 28

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From the autograph book of Cliff Gander. Compiled and transcribed by Liz Gander in 2002. Cliff was twelve years old when his mother made this entry in his book.

The Covered Wagon Trip to VA

Written by Iona Branch Gander. Transcript is at the end.

The Covered Wagon trip to VA

In the Fall of 1894 Alfred Branch and ~~family~~^{wife} Ida Branch and their four children loaded their belongings into a covered wagon and started to the Ozarks to look for a new home in the mountains. After roaming through many hills and valleys they decided to go on into Arkansas. However there were no more promising so they journeyed on through the swamps and canebrakes to Memphis Tenn. They spent the night on the Ferry at Memphis after crossing the Mississippi. The Captain of the ferry was afraid to let ~~them~~ stay on the west side of the river on account of bandits working on the levy.

After entering Tenn they headed East the length of the State. First stop for a visit was with a sister Mrs. Mollie Peathers near Johnson City Tenn where they spent Christmas week. Leaving soon after for Moccasin Gap & Rich Valley near Holston where they originally lived.

On this trip they had many

Interesting experiences, some very terrifying.
The time the team ran away turning
wagon and family over in a week.
The runaway was caused by the shock
and steam from water thrown on a
camp fire.

They were taken for gypsies, moonshine
and the large team, big baby, Lady
with beautiful hair attracted so many.

At nights mostly they slept in the
wagon which had a full size bedding
in the back half with just a lantern
for heat.

When the weather was bad they would
rent floor space in some farm house
and put their bed on the floor \$2.50
was about the average paid for such nights.

Some folks were so gracious the
family was invited in and treated
as company. There were real people.
Some were anxious to see them stay
on.

One preacher returned thanks and
forgot to ask if they had their
supper.

One lady called at 3 o'clock
a cold winter morning and wanted

them to get up. When they did start
about 5 o'clock still dark she had
to get the hired hand up and send
him 6 miles with them to get the \$2.50
they paid her for their disturbed sleep.
They had to change \$5.00 at the nearest
town. Poor man.

Transcript:

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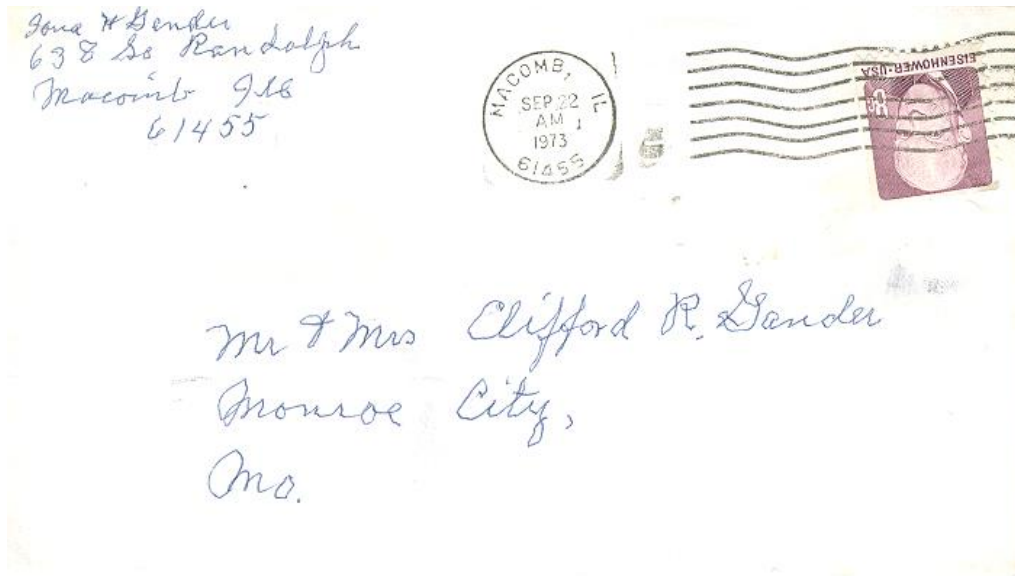
On this trip they had many Interesting experiences. Some very terrifying. The time the team ran away turning wagon and family over in a creek. The runaway was caused by the whosh and steam from water thrown on a camp fire.

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September 21, 1973: Iona Gander to Cliff Gander



Harve Gander died in January 1968. In her later years, Iona sometimes spent time at the home of her daughter Edith and Vic Young in Macomb, Illinois. This letter is written during such a visit when she was 88 years old. It gives some insight to her life. She notes that it is lonesome with "just Alfred and me". Alfred was her youngest sibling and he lived with Edith and Vic Young most of his later years. Since Iona was fairly deaf, it was hard for the two old folks to carry on a conversation. She mentions that "Mrs. B" plans to come for winter. This would be Mrs. Harriet Buckwalter who stayed with her and cared for her.

She is planning on having the whole family at her house for Thanksgiving and Christmas, which we always did. In this letter, Iona mentions that she has had her hair done and just noticed how gray she was getting. She also mentions how sick Hazel was. Hazel was her daughter-in-law, married to Bruce Gander. Hazel was very ill and died in 1974.

From the



of

Sept 21/73

Mrs. Harvey S. Gander

Dear Cliff & Jo:-

Just a line to say I
miss you very much.
It's real lonesome with just
Alfred and me. Talking is
difficult since I don't hear
too good.

Has been very gloomy here,
but wind is blowing strong.
What the farmer needs for
beans and corn.

Vick working today. He has
been on night duty for nearly
a week. Edith works till
nine o'clock to night.

Edith wants to bring me
home on Tues Oct 30 Mrs
B plans to come for winter
months Nov 1st

(over)

Printed by Earl E. Buckwalter

I hope to have you Children
home for Thanksgiving dinner
and again for Christmas.

Hope that will be agreeable.

Tell Alice she's always invited.

It is real warm outside
today. I went with Edith to
Colchester to get her hair set
and got my hair washed.

Karen did it well.

See I'm pretty Gray. Hadn't

Paid much attention to it
before. Got my B 12 shots here
and have a good supply of
medicine.

Take care you hard workers

I love you all.

Talked to Hazel This morn

She's a pretty sick girl.

Don't see how she stands it.

Said sometimes she felt so bad
she felt like jumping in
the well. Poor girl am so sorry
for her. Love

, Mother.

TOURIST PIONEERS

Jackie Gander Deets wrote these bits and snatches of memories of their 1920 "Tourist Trip" to Virginia. This was written in 1985.

Today we zip from one ocean to another in a few days, driving our big machines in air-conditioned comfort. Our well-marked highways, Interstates that bypass congested city areas, and everywhere comfortable motels make traveling so easy. Today I am sure I could drive from Northeast Missouri to Abingdon, Virginia in two easy days. The distance is around 700 miles.

But what was it like 65 years ago? In 1920 it took ten days. My Father, Harve Gander, bought his first car in 1919. It was a used car and he learned to drive it, driving it home from Palmyra. To save the tires, some old tires had been cut, and wired over the inflated tires. Naturally, they flopped around. When Mother saw him coming down the lane in that old contraption with the wheels wobbling, she thought he had wrecked the car. Sometime during that winter dad decided that "next summer when the corn is laid by we are going to get a new car and drive to Virginia". On one of the times when we were 'spending the day' with Sam and Della, Dad told them of our plan and they immediately decided to get a new car too and travel with us. During that winter, Mother wrote a letter to Standard Oil Company asking for road maps. They sent maps, but they were very unlike the highway maps of today. No highway numbers or any indications of distances or road conditions between the towns. Mother studied these maps and marked out the route we would take. She also started sewing. She made me a beautiful 'best dress' of blue voile with pink voile ruffles. I also had a new dress of plaid-gingham in lavender and green, and a dress of tan poplin, trimmed with red braids for travel. She made tan poplin shirts and short pants for Harvey and Cliff for travel, and ordered a khaki tan shirt and pants for Dad for travel. I know she sewed for herself, too, but I can remember only a black skirt of some shiny material and a pink crepe de chine blouse with a scalloped collar trimmed with some gray tubular

beads. Aunt Fairy made one just like it. I can remember them sitting on the porch working on the beading together. Dad and Herbert got the crop in and the corn laid by. The new car had arrived. How proud we were of it: A Model T touring car with a self-starter and side curtains - all shiny black. It had a toolbox on the running board. Dad rigged up a board along the running board on one side to make a place to carry our bedding, cooking and food supplies. There was no trunk space then. Uncle Sam had the same new car, rigged out similarly. Herbert was to stay at home and take care of the farm. He was 18. Uncle Alfred and Aunt Fairy were to stay at Sam's house, Alfred to take care of the chores, and Fairy to care for Nevada, who was only



A 1918 Ford Model T Touring car similar to the one the Gander family used on their trip to Virginia.

a few months old. There were four children and two adults in each car. Norma was still in diapers. Edith was two that summer, and I believe she was at least partially toilet trained.

When the great departure day arrived, Sam's came down and we started out, taking food already

prepared which was to be our first two days fare. We children were so excited. I can remember Clifford dancing around, "We going to ginny, we going to ginny!" We crossed the Mississippi river and over into Illinois. At noontime we stopped at a place called Weber Springs where we drank lots of spring water, ate fried chicken, mince pie, etc.

At that time, instead of highway numbers, roads, at least the main traveled roads were marked with symbols. We had started out on the HK - the Hannibal Kirksville Road. After we crossed the river the road toward Jacksonville became the "yellow, black and yellow" bands of the three colors painted on telephone poles, fence posts bridge frameworks etc. Dad would have Harvey and me watching for these road markers. Since we were leading the way, we also had to be sure that Uncle Sam was behind. Neither Dad nor Sam had ever driven in heavy traffic. When we came into Jacksonville [Illinois] they were really shocked. Cars whizzing every which way and no road signs to be seen. All Dad wanted to do was to get out of town and then get pointed in the right direction again.

Our first night out was spent in a schoolyard somewhere past Jacksonville. They parked the two cars, side by side, with space between to put a comfort on the ground and stretched another from the top of one car to the other. There they bedded down six children, R.C., Opal, Helen, Me, Harvey and Clifford. The adults had beds on the ground, with their babies between them. During the night one of the six children got sick, perhaps brought on by the excitement, the food, the water, I do not remember who it was but that one vomited all over the rest of us. I was on the end, so I woke up Uncle Sam. They cleaned us up and got us bedded down again, but that bedding smelled all the rest of the trip.

The next day the rains started. The side curtains, stored under the back seat, had to be buttoned on. It was hard to watch for the "Red and White", or the "Golden Belt" through those little glass windows. The roads were very muddy and progress was slow. I cannot remember where we spent that second night, but can remember spending one night in an abandoned farmhouse. There was a stack of old "funny papers" in one of the rooms. I read then to the other children. Remember the "Katzenjammer Kids"? When the weather was dry enough we would

stop and cook a meal by the roadside at noon. We usually ate cold suppers. Bread and a bucket of Karo syrup were standard fare. Sometimes, if there was water in a roadside Aunt Della would wash out Norma's diapers. She would hold them out the car window to air dry as we drove along. That made it easy for Harvey and I to do our job of watching to see if they were behind. Many times we were stuck.

The wonderful self-starters didn't always work, so Dad and Sam would have to resort to the crank. Sometimes we stayed with farm families, sometimes in small hotels. I can remember we drove into Corbin, Kentucky. It was raining. Dad and Sam went to a little hotel to get rooms. The lady who ran the hotel didn't want to rent us rooms. She thought Dad and Sam might be "Revenooers", looking for illegal stills. However, she did rent two rooms, one for each family. They were on a second floor. When morning came Opal threw her shoes out the window. I can still see poor Aunt Della, standing in the middle of the room, wringing her hands.

At one place in either Kentucky or Tennessee we had to be ferried across a major river. The ferry was a flat, scow like affair, pulled across with ropes. It could take only one car at a time. Harvey said we crossed the river in a Molasses Pan. (Dad had started making sorghum the year before, and the ferry reminded Harvey of the type of pan Dad used.) At another time we came to a mountain called "Gauley Mountain". The road was so bad with rocks and mud. A man was waiting at the bottom with a team of mules and a log chain to pull the tourist up the mountain. I have no idea what he charged, but Dad thought he was robbed.

We had been on the road ten days. We arrived in Abingdon around nightfall, and in the rain. Mother wanted Dad to go to a hotel so we could all be clean the next morning when we looked up our relatives. Mother made the mistake of saying she had a cousin in Abingdon. Dad said, "If you have relatives here, we're not going to a hotel." So we, all twelve of us, went in on Cousin Lonnie Nunley and his wife. They were not expecting us at all but they put us up, somehow. Mother felt so bad to take her dirty children in. I wonder what Dad's Khakis looked like after ten days on the road in the mud and rain. We stayed in that big wonderful old house of Lonnie's a

couple of days before going on to Holston and Moccasin Gap.

A new road was being built through Moccasin Gap, using convict labor. The convicts were all dressed in their black and white striped suits. Jim Davis - Aunt Van's son - was guarding them. He saw our Missouri License, and he and Mother talked. We went on to Aunt Van and Uncle Will Davis' house. Sam and Della had gone to some of her family. Aunt Van and Uncle Will Davis had a grandson, Malcolm staying with them. He was ten, my age, and had red hair. I fell in love with him immediately. Just down the hill, Aunt Phine lived in the house built by her father, John Phelps. She had three grandchildren with her at the time. Their Mother was away working somewhere. Myra, too, was my age. Lawrence and Nelson were older. The convict camp was not too far from there, and at the end of the day - on their chain - Jim would march them back to their camp. There was a big "sheep nose" apple tree down near the road. We kids would climb the tree and throw apples to the convicts. Sometimes they managed to catch them. Jim didn't seem to mind. The last time my Mother rode horseback was on that trip. She and Blanche were to go to visit Gladys Cumbow, another of Aunt Vans daughters. I quote Mother's words from one of my tapes.

"Yes, I rode sidesaddle. Uncle Will saddled two horses for us. He said, 'Onie, this one is the gentlest'. I wore a floppy long riding skirt and Uncle Will handed me up a little pillow for Edith to rest on. I had to hold her on in front of me and manage the horse. When we came to the top of the mountain where we had to go down the mountain to Gladys Cumbow's, Blanche said to me, 'I'll take the lead. You give the horse the rein, she will get you down'. I got down there, and I got back out again, but I don't see how I had nerve enough to do it. All those switchbacks! You remember, in 1941 we left the car at the top of the mountain and walked those switchbacks down."

When time came to leave Virginia, we met Sam and his family and drove to Johnson City, Tenn. Mother had called Cousin Ina Leonard the morning we left to tell her we would be there that afternoon. Poor Cousin Ina was doing her washing on the board when she got the call. She had to quit and start preparing supper for all of us. Cousin Leola came

over to help. I can remember only that she had cooked macaroni. I had never eaten it before. We did not have such luxuries on the farm in 1920. Cousin Bessie White was still confined to bed. Sherrill Jennings had been born only a few days before. We must have stayed with Cousin Ina for three or four days. Dad liked Arthur Leonard so much.

And now it was time to start the long trip back home. When we got to Knoxville, Tenn. we stayed overnight in the Hightower Hotel. The next morning R.C. was sick, really sick. To pass the time that day, Dad took us out into the country someplace where we four children could play. Mother cooked a meal over an open fire and Dad carved his name and address on one of those great beech trees with their white, smooth bark. The next day, R.C. was no better. Dad again took us out into the country along the Holston River. Dad tried to fish. Mother cooked a dinner for us over an open fire. I can remember her setting an opened can of sauerkraut in the coals to heat. During that day Sam had had a Doctor in for R.C. He had pneumonia. Knowing that the child would not be able to travel for some time, the two families decided to sell the cars and everyone would go home on the train except Sam and R.C. They hung a 'For Sale' sign on the two Ford Touring cars and parked them in front of the hotel. They sold them immediately. Mother said they got more for them than they had paid in the first place. We left Knoxville at night. The train ride was long, but very exciting to me. We changed in St. Louis. Dad bought each of us a big bowl of beef stew in the depot. I wanted another but didn't get it. When we got into Monroe City, we stayed overnight at the old Monroe Hotel - it burned a few years ago - and the next day, from someone, Dad bought a used car. We drove it home that day. We kids started to school the next week. It must have been at least two weeks before R.C. and Sam came on home.

In later years my Father and Mother took many long automobile trips, not only back to Virginia, but also over much of the West. I feel sure that no trip they ever took provided the adventure of that first "tourist trip".