

# I Review My Yesteryears

ALSO

WHY RURAL RETREAT SHOULD BE ONE OF THE  
OUTSTANDING SMALL TOWNS IN VIRGINIA  
EARLY HISTORY AND THE "GAY NINETIES"

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*By James McChesney Prickett*

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## Famous Folks I Have Seen and Some Few With Whom I Held Conversations

*In the years spent in both Nashville, Tenn., and Washington, D. C.  
Humorous Incidents and Facts, Etc.*

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## Sweet Voiced Daughters of the Old Fashioned South

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## Poems, etc.

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*Price \$1.50*

## FOREWORD

In mailing out this booklet to quite a few ON APPROVAL, will naturally have its set backs, with a price of ONE DOLLAR AND FIFTY CENTS (\$1.50), I am only mailing them however to those sources whom I feel will be more or less interested. I do not want any one to purchase a copy reluctantly, or feel I would be offended if they are not inclined to buy. On the other hand there may be those who will think I am somewhat nervy, having this bit of printed matter come to their doorstep.

Immediately upon receipt, any one not interested in making this purchase, if they will notify me, I will send required postage for the booklets return, or reimburse them for the amount spent in sending the pamphlet back to me. Periodically for several years I mailed out similar reading matter (tho' not as elaborate as this issue) as a good will gesture, no charge, sending them to customers and good friends, and each venture was decidedly a loss as a whole, however it did help in selling my products, to some of my customers. I just cannot do this any longer. Besides I do not have the income I once had and my expenses as traveling salesman, in some ways have doubled. I am therefore even asking close relatives to help me in publishing cost of this issue.

I was much encouraged however in issuing my booklet, *The Old South That Will Never Die*, in early 1959, as I practically sold out, and no more are available. I have worked on composing this booklet most of this year, at odd times, mainly Saturday and Sunday after- noons (as a rule I would be too tired, after traveling all day, to give it much attention at night.) If any one might think I simply sat down and wrote at random, it might be interesting to know that I have typed some of these pages three and four times.

I have not enlarged upon any subject or incident. What I have written have been the actual-actual fears of my childhood, hardships, mingled with pleasure, were just as I experienced them.

I have not attended school since I was fifteen years of age, I therefore ask the indulgence of my readers. There are those who

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## FOREWORD

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have had a college education, or studied the art of writing, who might smile broadly at some of my expressions. However I have done much reading since my school days and feel I have gathered information from time to time, about the construction of words. In my long career of more than a half a century as travelling salesman some of the closest friendships of my life have been among my customers to whom I sold my products. Often times when I have taken a circuitous route to a certain door step I have done so with pleasing anticipation, knowing I would receive a warm hand clasp and cheery greetings. I did not always have in mind how much I could sell them, or how enriched the day would be due to my call, but the visit would be along with my main object.

I have found that those good customers, who desire or prefer buying from me are just about as much interested in buying as I am in selling, and that pressure selling is of the worst kind, and causes a salesman to lose out rather than increase his sales.

Should there be someone who is bedfast, or confined within doors, these in particular, who would find I have made the day brighter, within these pages, certain incidents that would soothe them and drive away dull care, I would like for them to feel that I am sitting near by with appreciation and understanding. Or if this booklet would happen to drift into the hands of some dear, close friend I mingled with much in the yesteryears, and with whom I shared many pleasures, that would cause him or her to drift into reverie or retrospection, then with soft footsteps stroll along the shaded or vine shielded path- ways of their homes, that I too am walking close by their side, sharing with them the same thoughts and pleasures of that long ago.

I recall clearly when women wore their, hair in "Psyches." They wore long dresses, that in many instances only showed the tips of their very high-button shoes. The men wore derby hats and had mustaches. They wore very high collars (that often came in combat with their Adam's apple), and many wore very pointed patent leather shoes and white vests for Sundays or evening callings.

These were indeed Horse and Buggy Days, and no one should feel sorry for youngsters of that period because we had no automobiles, radios, television, telephones, electric lights, etc. But, oh, the glory of the picnics and parties! We had lots of fun at the gatherings of young folks to roam the nearby woodlands, hunting chestnuts and chinquapins (they are almost extinct in our sect@on now), or the long walks on the railroad tracks east of town to two delightful spring houses, not far from each other, the Cormany and Tartar homes to quench our thirst with cold crystal water.

I recall one particular elderly woman who wore a "Bustle," a fashion of those days. She passed our home regularly in making the rounds of the town. She carried a parasol, no matter the kind of weather. She wore a long gold chain that coiled around one ear, to her nose glasses. She walked in a dignified manner, in a bent-over fashion while her bustle projected out very prominently. I, as a small lad, wished I could sit on these soft cushions for a seat and ride around and see the country.

I have seen heavy wagons, and sometimes, buggies, mire up on either steep hillside nearing town and sometimes right in the depot yard. My earliest years were spent in a combination store, house, and dwelling about fifty feet from the railroad tracks right across the street from the present Vance Store in Rural Retreat. My father conducted a General Merchandise Store in the midst of all activity, diagonally across from the railway station. Unlike a building of this kind in a large city, we had a lovely playground alongside our home, a grapevine arbor, a deep well, where the scary faces of children sometimes peered into its eerie depths. Gooseberries and currants grew alongside our fence. Apple trees, cherry trees, and a little brook raced merrily alongside our back fence.

For forty years after we moved away, different store keepers came and went, likewise, those who made their homes in the dwelling

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part of the building. Many faces crossed over the threshold of our old home until it finally drifted into rapid state of decay, and for a long time it stood empty, lonely, and forlorn. Its soiled cracked windows seemed like saddened eyes that looked down upon the railroad tracks or seemed searching for the pathways from school or playground, hoping to enfold once again in its warm embrace, by the glowing hearth stone, chubby, ruddy faced youngsters who would come romping in from the snowy outside. It seemed to desire to hear again the pattering of small feet up and down its now creaky and ancient stairways. Also to see again, gathered around this same hearthstone, faces of-loved ones of the dim past, Father reading, Mother sewing, the children tripping here and there in a merry game, or sprawled upon the floor with story books or crayons. Eight of us were born in this old home. Finally workmen came and tore down what remained of those loved rafters and floorings, but they could not tear down the memories of that long ago.

We had about as much as other children in our town. I have known but little extreme poverty in my home section, and as Longfellow expressed in his story of Evangeline: "Here the richest were poor, and the poorest lived in

abundance."

I was nine years of age when we moved to our present ten room home that still faces the railroad, but stands back from it about a hundred feet, with a huge Maple tree in the front yard that must be twice as high as the house itself. Here is where my three sisters now live and a niece who comes in for the weekend, also two other nieces and a great niece who visit us at intervals, all of them indeed make it home for me in various ways--a bachelor.

My little fourteen-month old brother and I had whooping cough at the same time. The doctor said I would die and my brother would recover. The snows of many winters and the suns of many summers have lingered upon his little grave, while I am still groping along on this terrestrial sphere. When **the** little brother died, I recall there was much mystery about the room where he lay as a corpse. Much tip-toeing was done, and older ones of our household only spoke in whispers. At length the door was opened, and my two sisters and I were permitted to enter. Sitting around, were my parents, two aunts [Nellie and Paulina], and some neighbors. All eyes were glued on me as I immediately went over and rocked the cradle, as was my custom while he was living. He had twenty-five cent coins on his eye lids. I was too young to understand death; and to show how young I was, I recall the cradle was higher than my head.

My great delight as a little fellow was to watch the trains switch to and fro right in front of our front door. An engine would grab two or three box cars, snort and blow and jerk them up the railroad tracks just like it was awfully mad. I, of course, knew a man manipulated them but they always seemed much alive to me. I would sit there, a little fellow with my chin in my chubby hands, and wonder about the many mysteries of life, why was the sun yellow, and was quite sure the smoke from engines made the clouds. Few folk would notice my small figure as I mused away, but a good natured man, by the name of Ephriam Tarter, always hailed me with hearty greetings. He told me later on in life that I called him "Eater-Tar."

A former storekeeper had left some wigs up in the garret of my father's store, and my two older sisters found them. They would put one of these wigs on me and one of their dresses, paint and powder me up, and take me across the railroad where some kind folks lived, in a really old-fashioned Virginia home, with spacious grounds. I recall the mother of our playmates nearly

always wore a shawl over her head. I would be introduced by my sisters as a little cousin who had come to visit them. With great deference the Mother and older children would bow and shake hands with me. I had no idea they knew who I was.

The first corpse I ever saw was in this home. I thought she was a grown lady at the time, but I learned afterward that she was only fourteen years old. I remember someone lifting me up to take a view of her in the casket. The beauty of her face and the thin white hands crossed with a ring on one of her fingers made a great impression on me. I was told she had gone to Heaven, but I wanted to know, if so what was she doing in "that box," and what they would do with, her. I was told she would be put in the ground. I came away with a great fear that gripped my childish heart; they might put my Mama in the ground.

When I was very small, my Mother seemed to think we should be prepared, even if only in a small way, for school in advance of our attendance to help the teacher. I would stand by her side at the [p 11] sewing machine. She would put her finger on a letter and tell me to name it. She would sew a bit and then put her finger on another letter and so on. I recall when I came to a Q, it was nothing more than 0 with a tail on it. One day while I was learning my lesson, an excited crowd ran up the tracks; a young colored boy had been killed by the train.

What a seamstress was my mother! She was a genius in many ways, but she once made me a suit of clothes. I have a photo of myself taken when I was only two and a half years old, that shows a little velvet cap she made and on the top was black braid resembling the dollar mark. I would challenge any manufacturer of small boy's apparel to produce anything better.

One could have been assured that when I was a small lad that I would never shine on any kind of an athletic field. No one would ever see my photo on a sports page of a magazine, exalting me as a, daring and skillful baseball or football celebrity. I would climb up some distance in a tree and then I couldn't get down. One or both of my sisters, and possibly a playmate would follow up to show me. "You hold here and put your foot there"--and so on and still I couldn't make it. Then all of them would start off in disgust and leave me. Soon the neighbors and half the town would hear my wild screeching. I thought I would starve to death in that tree (in sight of our house mind you) and the birds would come and peck out my eyes. It never

occurred to me father would come with a ladder, or with several men and get me down from my lofty perch.

My playmates were mostly girls of about the same ages of my sisters. The little brother younger than myself had died, and the next brother was too young to play with us. Sitting here at my typewriter in the year nineteen hundred and sixty, I seem to hear again the sweet voices of children singing- "I Kneel Because I Love You," "I Measure My Love to Show You," "London Bridge Is Falling Down" and "Chicamee, Chickamee, Cranie Crow."

The first show I ever saw was held in what was then called the Academy, in the east end of town before there was a place for travelling entertainers. My Aunt Nellie, my father's sister took me along with one of her lady friends. I do not recall any of the show except just as the curtain went down a clown blew flour into the black comedian's [p 12]

face. As we stepped on the outside a big paper balloon sailed over our heads, and a voice came out saying: "Goodbye Clarie!" I was sure a man went up in that balloon, because I heard him call. My Aunt who was holding me by the hand almost had to drag me along, because I kept looking for him up in the sky.

The next morning I went out expecting to see the man hanging head downward in a tree. The next show I saw was in what was called "Buck's Block." A stage had been built for traveling shows. There was a clown who performed on a trapeze. He wore tights and had a big bunch of hair on the back of his head. He would sing a bit and then do stunts on the trapeze. One of the songs was "Down Went McGinty to the Bottom of the Well, The Well Had No Bottom So He Went on to Hell, Dressed in His Best Suit of Clothes." His next song was "McCarty Wasn't Hearty She's Got Another Party, She Might Lick McCarty But She Can't Lick Me!" (second husband)

One could have been assured, (as I have said before) that I would never attain any heights on an athletic field. At school when a baseball game was in the making two boys would be chosen to select the players for either side. I was never selected until they got down to the "Scrubs." However I would sometimes heave a hefty swing at the old yarn ball (with rubber center) and see it sail over the other boys' heads, was a thrill. I belonged to a gang of about eight town boys of about the same age. We were carefree and into

everything. The Depot men tried constantly to keep us away but never could. They would spit tobacco juice on our feet, sometimes at a distance of twenty feet and never miss. They would put us under sacks of wool, and sit on us. I have had one of these Depot men to squeeze me down in a barrel of water, with my clothes on. There was one stunt that could only be played but one time. For instance they would show a big crack in the depot floor, and tell us a traveling man had dropped a quarter **in** an exact spot. Then a boy would start at end of the Depot, a long crawl on hands and knees, and then along with bystanders, a half a dozen voices would be "so polite" to show the right spot, and when the boy arrived, they would dump a big tub of icy cold water on the back of his neck. We town kids were in everything possible all day long. When sheep were loaded we would sometimes hold them in one deck while another was being loaded. I have had a sheep to back up and step on my sore toe. It was rare the shipper ever gave us anything, although we would follow him around and make [p13] ourselves conspicuous, barefoot boys.

What a few small coins would have meant to ??

Much livestock ran at large in those days, and were often killed by the train. We would walk a couple of miles to see the remains, our bare feet almost blistered on the hot railroad ties. If a threshing machine came through town, we would hang on the back about a foot from the ground to a nearby wheat field. While the thresher was doing the work, we would get under the big spout and let chaff and dirt cover us up. Or we would be off with a big whoop up the railroad to the "Summit" on a warm summer afternoon after a brisk shower. of rain and slide down the high embankment in the mud. A half a dozen boys could make it slick in no time. Then we would go over to a near-by brook in a woodland and wash our trousers. (How my mother did hate dirt!)

Some of the near-by farmers had their homes within the town limits. Two of these brothers, I am speaking of in above paragraph, had work horses available for riding; but one was very risky. One time, about six of us rode "Old Luce" over to a swimming hole. About two on her neck and the rest clinging on to each other as far back as possible. "Old Luce" was a mother horse, and I doubt if she would have stepped on any of us if we had fallen off. Dr. Harloe Bailey now lives in the old home of these "Activities." There were eight in "our gang," and all have passed over the Great Divide except two of



us. The other one is reported as a millionaire, what a contrast to my bordering on to nothing.

A financial loss that hurt me worst of my life, was a dime, when I was about twelve years of age. A doctor who lived in our Black Lick section came in town in a wild gallop up to the Depot on a plump "filly." I was watching the people get off of an early afternoon train. He almost turned a handspring as he caught the handle of the moving coach. He threw a dime close to my bare feet and told me to take the horse over to a farmer about a mile from town. All the way over I figured out what I would buy with this unusual amount of money. I'd get one of those long coconut bars of candy, one of those long sticks of white gum (about six inches that one could chew on about half a day), two cents worth of cheese, and so on. I turned the horse over to the farmer and took a short cut through a field, then crossed over a rail fence. I got to looking for that dime and nearly [p14] tore the lining out of my clothes, but I never did find that money.

Then dug around in the grass, I see school children riding today in big warm busses, whereas we only, had about two blocks to go, quite a few would walk a distance from the country. I never think of my school days but what I think of good-natured gatherings, I would say "crowd," who came from some distance and most of the way down the railroad tracks, and would pass our home. About sixteen of them, all by the same name --all brothers sisters, and first cousins--from Kinder's Valley, named for their forefathers. What impressed me most, (as I would be on my way to school also) that most of them were laughing or smiling, as several were extra witty, and others good story-tellers. They were honorable, thrifty, kind, and aggressive as were their forebears. Children, today, have nice uniform heated school rooms and inside rest rooms, but when I went to school we missed many comforts.

Children should be taught that nothing would harm them. When my two older sisters and I were small, we had a colored cook who would get us behind the kitchen stove after the evening meal and tell us that "Hant Hollow," a dense woodland near-town with only room for a buggy to pass through in those days, was infested with lions and tigers that relished the meat of small children, and the "headless" man (now I should not have been scared that the "headless" man would swallow me), and snakes that coiled around you, and hobgoblins that roamed at large. I would have to go through our dining -room on the ground floor, then up a flight of about eight steps. I

would race through about six kilometres ahead of myself up those steps, and I was always afraid a wild beast would have his jaws on the back of my neck before I could get my trembling hand on the latch.

Digressing a moment, there was once in our town a beloved doctor who had about six sons. When they were all in their early or late teens, they moved to Kentucky and later on scattered to different parts of the country. It had been forty years since four of them had been together at one time. So they decided to meet in their old home town and scenes of their boyhood. One of the first places they wanted to see was "Hant Hollow," not that they were looking for any "Hants," but the spooky tales they had heard when small boys still held for them a weird fascination. But the "spooks" had all departed; a wide highway now runs through it with houses all around. When I was a small lad, all we would have to do would [p 15] be cross the hall to the side entrance of my father's store, and naturally I was constantly in there. Two men would be sitting together, and one would say: "Let's cut off that boy's ears!" One would grab me and the other one would take out his knife with a long blade, and whet it on his boot, and take the back of the knife and run it up and down on the back of my ear. The, other would say, "What did you want to cut off that boy's ear for; see the blood running down his neck," and I would run, screaming across the hall to our nursery. Can one see any possible fun in frightening the life out of a child? I think these kind of tactics should draw a jail sentence.

I am very fortunate--and what a privilege that the two sisters I speak of within these pages are still living. We shared all the joys and sorrows together of our childhood. It was rarely ever they went anywhere but what I would come trotting along behind them, and at times much to their exasperation. There is only about a year and a half difference in our ages. So near the same size were our little button shoes that carried us across the railroad tracks to school, or up and down our various playgrounds.

I am all excited on this particular morning. I say it is June time, for in an hour or so we will be on the way to our paternal grand-parents in Abingdon. I am dressed up in a big Buster Brown Collar, with a little blue cap on the back of my head. The Depot was located right across the railroad from our home. I made several trips to the station to ask how long it would be until the train came. One of the Depot men got impatient with me and told me to run up to my father's store and bring back a string "about that long"--measuring with his hands. All out of breath, I rushed back with the string. He stretched the,

string out to its full length, looked over his glasses, and said it would be about as long as that string, while all his fellow workers roared with laughter at my red-faced embarrassment, knowing he had made fun of me.

After what seemed a long time the old Norfolk & Western engine would curl its blue smoke over the red coaches; and my mother, two sisters, a little brother, and a baby in arms, and I would be aboard. I would pity the little barefoot boys, in their frayed straw hats and their dust stained feet, not dressed up like me, and not riding on the train like me. It seemed the Depot and the telegraph poles were moving swiftly by. I felt I was drifting into a strange country and the stations the brakeman called out sounded like a foreign land, such [p16] as "Seven Mile Ford ... .. Chilhowie," and "Meadow View." Soon we were getting off the train at Abingdon. Old Taylor Wertz, who had once been a slave in the McConnell home, was sitting on the top of a closed coach. I recall the upholstery was somewhat faded and the carriage wheels a bit wobbly, and the horses very lean, for the last of my grandfather's wealth had about ebbed away. Old Taylor never addressed my grandparents without removing his hat and bowing low, saying "Mar'sr Tom," or "Mish Bettie!" We reach the old home of my mother. Grandfather is waiting for us at the gate (with all his erect six feet two). He was ever the essence of kindness and gentility with all that goes to make up a soft-spoken Southern gentleman. He pulled my sisters and me, one by one, from the old carriage, pitched us up and caught us with his mighty "Ho Ho!" Grandmother gave us equal welcome. It was their delight to look after our comfort and enjoyment. Grandmother never visited in our home, but what she carried a big willow basket, and when she got off the train, my sisters and I, all three of us wanted to carry it, knowing that within its downy folds, loving hands had tucked away small gifts for all of us. In this old home of my Mother fruit and shade trees graced the surroundings. Delicious gooseberries and currants (same as at our home) lined the fence here and there. It was an old fashioned frame building with upper rooms in the middle section, and a wing on each side of the central part. There was an observatory on the roof with a platform and hand rails all around from which one could get an excellent view of the surrounding country. The entire porch was encircled with green blinds. The kitchen after the manner of old Southern homes, was a brick building about twenty feet away from the home proper, and connected with a brick walk. It had a big hearth where an enormous kettle hung, surrounded by pots and pans, and also where the grandchildren could run in and warm themselves on a chilly day. Beyond the kitchen, the carriage house, and the chicken house, as I recall the latter was about twenty feet high. There were heavy old cellar

doors from which the grandchildren found great delight in sliding down their steep incline. Old fashioned furniture, high bedsteads that sometimes we youngsters, would have to take a running start to enable us to land within its downy folds. The tall "grand-father clock," I always thought some one had been in the McConnell home, and had been inspired to write about this old clock.

I would sit on the front porch with grandfather, while he smoked his pipe. He would have a carpet slipper hanging perilously on the [17] tip end of one foot. I would ask him questions, no philosopher or scientist could answer, but in his quiet dignity would give me some kind of satisfactory answers. Our home was in the heart of town, but my mother's old home was near a creek in the East end of Abingdon. I was not accustomed to the rapid serenade of multitudes of frogs, kadydids, and crickets. Then grandfather would lean over and put the tip ends of his fingers together and whistle mournfully. This mingled with the eerie sounds from creek and trees would cause me to think about what our colored cook had told my sisters and I about the spooks and hobgoblins that roamed at large at night and sometimes snatched little children clear out of existence. Then I would sit closer to Grandfather, so just in case a long arm would reach across the bannisters and grab me by the nap of the neck, grandfather would grab me by the heels before I disappeared behind the thick shrubbery and vines that surrounded the porch.

Then grandmother would come wearing a black sunbonnet, and with a sharp reminder to the old gentleman of some household duty, and in contrast, Grandfather would look over his spectacles, point a finger at her and say gently; "Alright Betty! Alright Betty!"

My grandmother would keep the home closed most of the year, and it always had a musty atmosphere. My Mother on arrival would throw open the parlor windows, let in the sunlight, sit down at the old piano she had not seen for a year, and with no sheet music whatsoever, sing and play the songs of her girlhood. I would gather up my coat tails, and dance around a little marble top table that stood in the middle of the room, when she played one of her lively tunes. This old piano was given to my mother on her ninth birthday, right after the Civil War. It is about ninetythree years old and graces our parlor in Rural Retreat. My Mother played upon it as a little girl, a young lassie, a young lady, a young mother, and on down through the years until she had reached three score years and ten. Four generations of golden haired, blue eyed lassies have had soft hands to glide over its ivory keys.

About two years ago her great grand- daughter had it speak with its golden voice, little dulled by passing time.

The old McConnell's home still stands in the east end of Abingdon, a ghost of the vanished yesteryears. I get fleeting glances of it as I drive along highway No. 11 on my way into Tennessee. However there have been times I have slowed down my motor, then gone out of my way to pass this old home. I would seem to see my Mother [p18] again, a young lassie, playing and romping upon the grassy green of the spacious lawn, the gold of the sun mingling in her windswept golden dresses. Or when a bit older, her blue eyes shining as she trips lightly down the pathway to meet my father, then the two stroll hand in hand, in the spring time of life, into the warm embrace of the old homestead that shielded her young life.

Reverently and reluctantly I fold up these pages of my fancy, close my eyes for a moment in sweet reverie, then start my motor and drive on.

After my father died, leaving my mother with seven children I shared with her the hardships and despair. Often she would weep and cry, then too she would speak of shortness of breath and palpitation of the heart and I knew folks could die suddenly with this. So I would sometimes go out in the chimney corner with tears spattering on my bare feet and pray if the Lord would give my Mother until I was grown there would be nothing I would not do for her. After school or from some playground my bare feet flying in the sun I would race home to find out about my Mother.

I had always gone to the "free school" but after my father died, the new principal of the recently [founded?] Hawkins Chapel Institute came soliciting for scholars. He, my Mother and I all went in the parlor together. My Mother told him "there was no way to send us to a pay school." Either he or I suggested I'd be the Janitor. In zero weather in snows up to my waist I'd wade across the railroad tracks to build the fires. I realized it was a vital time for me to learn. I was very fond of history and in the evenings while chopping the wood, although I did not attract any particular attention to those passing by, I would also be marching along with George Washington.

Now I am fourteen and am getting up in the world. I have on my best suit of clothes and wear a white collar. I am clerking in a store at a dollar a week.

These pages are not only dedicated to our parents but also to my older

sisters, Mrs. Gladese Atkins, of Houston, Texas, and Mrs. Pauline Miller, Rural Retreat, Va., who are linked forever in golden memory with my childhood.

I will continue with incidents of my early struggles for a start in life both in Nashville, Tenn. and Washington, D.C. [p19]

*The scribe of this booklet, taken on his twenty-first birthday in Nashville, Tenn.  
(Don't tell anybody, but the only thing holding down  
the fabulous Watch Band in the white vest  
was a safety pin bought at the five and ten  
especially for this occasion.)*

seen, as we passed over it a steam boat ploughed its strenuous way, leaving behind its silvery mist and foam. I had never seen one before. As we strolled along the electric light signs glowed with their varied [p21] . . .

*Inasmuch as walking would be invigorating  
my Uncle and I started for his home in  
East Nashville, near Third and Russell St.  
The Cumberland River was the largest  
stream of water I had ever seen.[p21a]*

brilliant colorings. The Jackson Building, then Nashville, largest, seemed as high as a mountain. The Tulane, Duncan, and famed Maxwell House (the latter still standing, and operating), seeming equally as large. Later on the transfer station was a marvel to me, where all street cars passed through it on the Public Square.

I was greeted most warmly by "Aunt Artie" (Aunt by marriage) who mothered me in quite a few ways, as I was still just a lad to her. Also lovely greetings from their little three year old daughter. My Uncle was at all times interested in my welfare and helped me in getting started on the roadway of life.

The very first step I took was made in the right direction. A Sunday or so after my arrival I started going to Sunday School at the Woodland Street Presbyterian Church. There is no other course for a young man or woman as a stranger in a big city that is as important and uplifting as the pathway that leads to a church door. I met some young folks of about my same age, and some of them I have contacted on various trips to Nashville down through

the years. The first job I had was for the C. Larsen book store, on the corner of Church and Summer Street, now 5th Avenue. But this only lasted for the holiday rush. I could not find the work of my choice, in a hardware store, and that winter, I did various odd jobs. After Christmas I would go from day to day trudging up and down the street, and oh the nerve it took to keep going, not only from the fact I was timid, but the constant turn downs. Back to my home in Virginia seemed almost like a million miles. I had various jobs throughout the spring, summer and fall, and it was only at winter time that I was able to secure a job with a Wholesale Hardware house. I started out for the Gray & Dudley Hardware Co. at twenty dollars a month, and paid seventeen of this for my board. My job was putting away the Shelf Hardware that came in very heavy boxes and barrels--for instance a barrel of hinges would weigh five hundred pounds, and I only weighed about one hundred and ten. I would have someone pull the barrel over on a special devised roller bearing truck, and then I was able to push it along. I had clerked in stores during most of my boyhood, and was not like a farmer boy who was accustomed to manual labor. Then too I ate a lot of trash, in the grocery side of the stores.

The first winter we had to go to work at seven o'clock in the morning, which was six o'clock our Virginia time. I walked through "Black Bottom" a Negro section while the stars were still shining, because I did not have five cents car fare. However where I boarded in South Nashville had many nice homes.

The first summer was particularly hard on me. My home town Rural Retreat, Va., is twenty-seven hundred feet above the sea level. [p22]

. . . . One day he sent for me and showed me some very cheap looking pocket knives, that the Co. had had on hand about twenty years. The prices were so cheap they could be sold at five and ten cent stores. S. H. Kress was just opening up a new store. The old saying "it is better to be a green salesman than a blue one"; also, "the darn fool didn't know it couldn't be done, so he tried." If someone had said to me, "Why Kress has stores all over the country, and they do their buying in New York City," but not knowing all this I went in, and the manager after examining the knives asked me if I could get samples to send to New York. I did and they bought the entire lot. I got to selling more and more hardware right along, and it was not six weeks until I got a letter from the Sales Manager that they thought I would be the best city salesman they ever had. Very proudly I sent this letter to my Mother.

I kept this work up very earnestly, and continued increasing my sales right along. I would sell these grocery men, different kinds of items in hardware needed in a home, and then on the next trip, they would not have any of it displayed where folks could see it, and consequently little or nothing sold. So I got the idea of a combination display case with glass front and shelves in the back to keep stock. We gave away free with a hundred dollar order of shelf hardware. I scattered them pretty much over Nashville, and the company liked the business I got and so they sent me to Memphis, Chattanooga, and Atlanta with the famous "Prickett" Cabinet, that was my original idea and design that had my name etched on the glass door. About that time I had a column in the "Traveling Men"'s (weekly) section of the *Nashville Tennessean*, mainly about traveling salesmen, verse or what not. So I was dubbed "Poet, Salesman, Inventor."

I continued growing in the selling game, and finally talked the Company into buying me an automobile. This was indeed an "old timer" and would be very laughable alongside, one of the present 1960 models. A right hand drive, only one cylinder, no windshield, and a crank to carry in the car to "wind her up." It had a 28" x 3" tire, about the size of the present day motorcycles. Instead of increasing my business I was too busy working on it with a flat tire, or "she would go plumb dead" at the slightest provocation. It had no doors, one simply fell in and fell out of it. A long slender handle to throw straight forward for high speed (the highest about twenty miles per hour). Autos were so scarce when I would be coaxing it to get going, quite a crowd would gather around, especially small boys, would scarcely give me elbow room. I hit on an idea: I would say, "This thing blew up last week," and one little boy was found afterward way up in a tree top--and how they would scatter.

One of the Company co-workers whom I had met at the Woodland Street Presbyterian Sunday School, and incidentally his father [p24] . . . .

About thirty years ago Thomas Dixon made quite a name for himself in writing his several books in defense of Dixie Land. In one of his volumes--I think it was *The Leopards Spots*: "To Harriet A Sweet Voiced Daughter of the Old Fashioned South" was the most appealing to me of any book dedication I have ever read.

Over a long span of years I have known many of the fair sex who have expressed themselves in those soft, dulcet musical tones with the Southern accent. Lassies in their teens, young ladies, matrons, and those who had become quite elderly. I would naturally consider my Mother, as possessing



the foremost of all these qualities. (photo above) Her gift along this line made her conversation lovely, but she was also a very accomplished singer. The old piano in our home has known the soft touch of her fingers, when a young lassie, until she was grandmother, her sweet voice vibrating throughout the walls of her girlhood home, then later on, our own--down through the years.

I would place "Aunt Nellie," my father's sister, the next to be listed among the most pleasing to entrance her listeners in conversation. She lived in our home until I was nine years of age, and in many ways meant almost as much to us children as our own Mother. I would name next a kindly, gentle soul, who would be about the last of my parents' generation, who was oddly related to us, first cousin to my Mother and second cousin to my Father. [Cousin Carrie Beattie Gwyn] Although she had wended her way down the corridors of time until she had passed the four score milestone, with all its mellowed experiences in life--and yet her lovely smile was almost void of the seams of time, although she had snow white hair. My niece lived with her for twenty years in Marion, Va., due to her work in this lovely town. What great satisfaction and delight for my sisters, nieces, and I to visit her in her attractive home, with its lovely antiques, and beautiful modern and old fashioned furniture. The soft accent of the old South in her greetings, her blue [p35] eyes shining like a girl's as she would enfold us in her warm embrace. She has an only daughter who is almost a duplicate.

I would of course include my own sisters, nieces, great nieces, and cousins, among those musical voiced lassies of Dixie Land.

When I first went to Nashville, in my teens, a young man whom I met in Sunday School, had me go with him one Sunday afternoon, behind an old gray horse and rubber tired buggy, to [the] little village of Madison. The young lady he took me along to meet, I thought had the loveliest, soft southern drawl in expressing herself. He afterward married her, and his father and brother have built some of the largest skyscrapers in Nashville. After leaving the Capitol City of Tennessee, I spent years in Washington, D. C. and yet later on I changed my headquarters to my home town and Roanoke. It was then my work took me at regular intervals back into Nashville, and I would look up these old friends on my various visits--down through the years until they became grandparents. This lovely-voiced lady whom I knew in her girlhood--I don't think her lovely southern accent had ever lost any of its charm, and little changed with passing time. Her husband is the one I have mentioned in another section of this booklet who was responsible for my

becoming a member of the Tennessee State Guards.

In the years I spent in Washington, D. C. I met and conversed with many ladies whose homes had been in almost every section of the country, quite a few with attractive accents, but none with the soft pleasing drawl of the belles of Dixie Land.

There is a young woman who owns and operates a jewelry store about a dozen miles south of Columbia, Tenn., and is one of my customers to whom I sell my jewelry products. She is originally from what is known as the Deep South. Biloxi, Mississippi. I would just love to hear her express herself in the charming accent of that section, for instance she said to me one day; "My dawter was bawn in Mawtch." God grant none of these sweet voiced daughters of Dixie Land in moving into other sections of the country, will ever try to alter, or acquire any other accent, and resent any chiding or belittling of the musical accent, that has come down to them from generations of great grand dames, who danced the fantastic steps in silken gowns and hoop skirts. Their soft dulcet, fascinating speech belongs as much to the old South, as the suns shafts of gold that shine through the branches of Magnolia trees--or the mellow moon-light that gilds the miles of cotton fields--or the ripple of the silvery waters of the Tennessee, or the strains of the sweet voiced mocking bird that drifts over the fields of golden ripening grain--or the silent marble sentinel, who stands with drawn musket in the county seats throughout the heart of Dixie. All of these with its memories and traditions belong to the Old South That Will Never Die. [p36]