

From an article on the Minter Jackson Prickett family

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Minter Jackson Prickett [Jr.] and his family moved to Troutville in the early 1930s. His wife, Pauline Elizabeth Layman, was a native of Botetourt County, the daughter of George W. Layman.

A native of Wythe County, Virginia, Minter was the son of Minter Jackson Prickett and Laura Bell McConnell. On both sides of his family, Minter was descended from some of the earliest settlers of the country.

On his paternal side the Pricketts were among the first Quakers to settle in New Jersey. Later generations were among the very first pioneers to settle in the Monongahela River Valley in northwestern Virginia (now West Virginia). Capt. Jacob Prickett, an Indian trader from New Jersey, established a trading post with the Indians near present-day Fairmont, W. Va. He moved there with his family before the American Revolution, and in 1772 he beheld Prickett's Fort, a reconstructed version of which is now Prickett's Fort State Park. Prickett's youngest son was scalped by Indians at age 16, his oldest son's wife, Charity, was said to be the first white woman to cross the Allegheny Mountains in that part of the country. She and her husband Josiah were Minter's great-great-grandparents. On his father's mother's side, the Baileys, Carrs, and Minters were among the first settlers of the Northern Neck; the Jacksons were among the first settlers of Massachusetts, Long Island, and New Jersey. Descendants of both groups became some of the earliest and more prominent settlers of present-day Lewis County, West Virginia.

On his mother's side, the McConnells, Beaties, McChesneys, Berrys, and Allison were in Washington County by the time of the American Revolution and served as both officers and enlisted men in the battles of Guilford Courthouse and Kings Mountain, NC. When Smyth County was organized in 1834, Minter's great-grandfather Col. Robert Madison Beatie was named first clerk of court. A prosperous "gentleman" farmer, he also operated a well-known tavern where Andrew Jackson stopped on his way to or from Washington. His daughters were well-educated and feisty and his oldest son was a good friend and "right arm" to Confederate general and leading guerilla fighter John Singleton Mosby. Captain Fount Beatie and Mosby fought together, married sisters, and lived in the DC area in later years, where Minter learned to know both men. Fount's sister Rachel married Minter's grandfather Thomas Guilford McConnell

and both lived with Minter's mother until their deaths. When his grandmother's eyesight grew dim, Minter read aloud to her. She loved the great Victorian novelists and Minter developed a lifetime love for great literature -- both fiction and nonfiction -- and for reading aloud.

Both sides of his family were Confederate sympathizers, but on his father's side brothers did not agree with each other. His grandfather WBF Prickett, M.D., moved to Greenbrier County because it was pro-Confederate and served for a time with the Confederate army; WBF's father and favorite brother, James, had moved with their families to southern Illinois in the 1850s, where they were devout Unionists. James lost his eldest son, a segeant, in the Battle of

Fort Donelson. Despite their political differences the family remained close, visited and corresponded together in the postwar years until WBF's death at age 54. His grandmother Nancy Jackson (Prickett) had two brothers in the Virginia legislature before the war. Minter Jackson, a prosperous merchant, was pro-Southern and moved to Southwest Virginia. A widower, he married Rachel Beatie's sister Isabelle. Joseph Blackwell Jackson, a member of the Virginia Senate in the 1850s and clerk of the Lewis County courts for many years was strongly pro-Unionist.

At 17, Minter's father, Minter Jackson Prickett (b1857), moved to Marion to go to work for his uncle Mint. His own father (whose lungs were bad) was terminally ill.

There he met his uncle's newly-acquired niece, Miss "Lolly" McConnell, a beautiful young lady fresh out of boarding school in Staunton. In his diary Minter described her as "very intelligent" and the "most candid young lady" he had ever met. Minter was proud to be developing a reputation as one of the most fun-loving young men in the county, and he took every occasion to attend a ball, participate in a jousting tournament, read a good book, go to hear a good sermon, attend a revival. He "gave [his] life to Christ" at least for a couple of weeks when he received a teasing letter from Lolly expressing her surprise that he had been to a ball. She thought he had "become a Christian and given up all worldly pleasures" and said she'd be willing to give them up herself if she could only become a Christian.

The two became engaged and despite a couple of flings on both sides when Lolly spent months visiting boarding schools friends and her uncle Fount in northern Virginia, renewed their commitment some time after her return to Abingdon. Minter claimed he was going to Illinois to seek his fortune, Lolly implored him to remain, they met in Chilhowie to say their farewell, and eloped that night to Bristol to marry. Nine months to the day later, their first baby arrived. Minter, whose health was poor, taught for a few months, then opened a store for his uncle Mint in Mount Airy (soon renamed Rural Retreat). Sixteen years and eleven babies later (four died in infancy) Minter died of pneumonia (January 1896), having gone hunting in his "dancing pumps" after attending a ball. He left his family a large, partly-new handsome frame house and several pieces of real estate. He left his uncle Minter a debt of about \$12,000 (which the uncle, a thrifty man, reluctantly but promptly canceled). Minter, Jr., was 8 months old. His oldest brother Jamie was 13, the oldest sister 15. Lolly's aging parents were living with them, her father – a once-prosperous merchant and entrepreneur – having lost all his money, partly because impending senility had marred his judgment, partly because of nation-wide financial crises and bad luck.

Somehow Lolly managed to hold home and family together, though her second daughter Polly left highschool to get married. None of the children got the college education they so much wanted, and Minter, Jr., left school after eighth grade, having read "all the books his teachers had read" and gotten a job at his Uncle Jim Prickett's store. "Major" Prickett, who had had no military service of any kind was a lover of birds and reading. An eccentric man with a delightful wit and a strong lisp, he was president of the bank "and the most popular man in Rural Retreat." Many of Minter's stories throughout his life were about the foibles of his Uncle Jim

and Aunt Lizzie, and many of his favorite playmates were among their children.

After taking a series of correspondence courses on architecture, business, English, and so on, (and after breaking up with his lady love) Minter left home to join his brother Jamie, who had become a highly successful hardware salesman in Washington, D.C. Minter learned to become a good salesman but had a hard time finding a career he really liked, traveling and selling correspondence courses for a time before going to the headquarters of Shapleigh Hardware in St. Louis. He had remained an avid reader and at night he studied the works of some of the world's great philosophers.

With his ready wit and good manners (schoolmates often described him as "the politest boy" they ever knew), he quickly endeared himself to his new acquaintances. Despite being nearsighted, he had a keen eye, was pitcher for his Rural Retreat baseball team (no softball then), and when he was drafted into the army in World War I was quite a good sharpshooter. Though the army had erroneously failed to classify him as 4F despite his hernia, Minter was thrilled to be in the army and proud to discover that despite his hernia and small size he could carry a backpack of 75 pounds on a march and not fall out, while all around him big hearty farm boys were fainting in the hot Iowa sun. And he was delighted to be chosen for training with the new machine guns. As he was waiting to go overseas, he proudly wrote his mother that his unit would be among the first to go into battle and the last to leave but that she was not to worry because with his machine gun he could kill a 100 Germans before they could hurt him. He arrived in France in August, spent a lot of time in muddy trenches and getting "deloused" before coming down with the mumps and later with hernia problems. He spent the last months of the war in a French hospital in Lyon where he flirted with the nurses, taught beautiful ones to speak English, sang My Country Tis of Thee (which he told the French was the American national anthem), learned as much French as he could from a beautiful nurse, grew a French handlebar mustache, and became fondly known as "le americain comique."

After the war, he visited both family and more distant kin on his way back to St. Louis. But much as he liked St. Louis and the St. Louis Cardinals, he didn't like being cooped up in the big 9-story headquarters of Shapleigh Hardware. He became a traveling salesman for Shapleigh, headquartered at Big Stone Gap, taking the train and walking many miles to reach country stores. When a man in his hotel needed someone to drive him and his car across the mountain roads to the next town. He was aware that the man had become very white and very quiet. When they reached their destination the man asked him if he'd ever driven before. Minter truthfully said, "No." The man told him it would be a good idea to slow down when he went around curves.

Minter next found himself managing a hardware store in Kimball, West Virginia. When school started that fall, a pretty red-headed school teacher, Polly Layman (see George Layman family) caught his attention. He courted her ardently in person and in letters, and the next summer persuaded her to become engaged.

Married in Troutville in September, 1924, they lived in Bluefield and had one child,

Patricia Elizabeth. Six month later came the Big Crash of October 1929. Minter had entered the insurance business in 1923, selling casualty insurance, primarily to coal companies. As the coals business crashed, Minter's financial prospects took a downturn. Pauline and "Patty" moved back to Troutville "for a few months" till the economy improved and Minter paid off some small debts. But Pauline's father was declining in health, the economy worsened and in October 1933 Minter reluctantly sent the household furniture to Troutville and moved in with his family and his in-laws.

He helped with the family coal and tourist business and job hunted in Roanoke, which was somewhat less depressed than Bluefield. Finally he found a job selling "industrial insurance" with a draw of \$15 a week. This meant that he went door to door in the poorer sections of town, black and white, selling small policies and collecting the weekly or monthly premiums of 25c or less. His customers earned no interest but it was a way of putting money aside that they might otherwise have spent and thus enabled them to build up a small reserve.

Over the next few years he improved his business and by 1938 had gone to work for the Farm Bureau Insurance company selling automobile insurance. In 1944 he was named district sales manager for present-day Nartionwide Insurance Company, a forerunner in offering mutual insurance. A born teacher who had learned to be a good salesman, Minter lead his district to becoming one of the most productive in the state. He retired in May 1960, well-liked and highly respected by the men and women who worked for and with him.

In the meantime Minter had taken an active interest in the development of Troutville, being one of the first to push for incorporation in order to passing zoning ordinances to control the development of the town and to ensure its attractive appearance. Though it took a number of years to achieve his goals, Minter was elected to the first Town Council and served until advancing age made it impossible for him to carry out his duties effectively.

He died in 1975 of heart failure and intestinal bleeding, and at the church was packed with his many friends and neighbors. The principal comment people would make about him was that "he was an old-fashioned Virginia gentleman and he was so much fun!"

by his daughter, Patricia Prickett Hickin

An amended version The Minter Jackson Prickett family

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After taking a series of correspondence courses on architecture, business, English, and so on, (and after breaking up with his lady love) Minter left home at age 19 to join his brother Jamie, who had become a highly successful hardware salesman in Washington, D.C. Minter learned to become a good salesman but had a hard time finding a career he really liked, traveling and selling correspondence courses for a time before going to the headquarters of Shapleigh Hardware in St.Louis. He had remained an avid reader and at night he studied the works of some of the world's great philosophers.

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He arrived in France in August, 1918, spent a lot of time in muddy trenches and getting "deloused" before coming down with the mumps and later with ruptured hernia. He once got close enough to the front to hear the heavy artillery. He spent the next few months in a French hospital in Lyon where he flirted with the nurses, taught beautiful ones to speak English, sang My Country Tis of Thee (which he told the French was the American national anthem) for patients and staff, learned as much French as he could from a beautiful nurse, grew a French handlebar mustache, and became fondly known as "le americain comique." After the Armistice he could write home without fear of censorship. He never received a letter from home – until they were finally forwarded to him in Rural Retreat months later. He returned home in February, fearing his family had been wiped out in the terrible influenza epidemic on 1918. He always said that the Kaiser had surrendered upon hearing that he had arrived in France. He achieved the rank of Private First Class.

After the war, he visited both family and more distant kin on his way back to St. Louis. But much as he liked St Louis and the St. Louis Cardinals, he didn't like being cooped up in the big 9-story headquarters of Shapleigh Hardware. He became a traveling salesman for Shapleigh, headquartered at Big Stone Gap, taking the train and walking many miles to reach remote country hardware stores. When a man in his hotel needed someone to drive him and his car across the mountain roads to the next town, Minter volunteered. He was aware that the man become very white and very quiet. When they reached their destination, his passenger asked if he'd ever driven before. Minter truthfully said, "No." "Next time consider slowing for curves," came the curt response.

Minter next found himself managing a hardware store in Kimball, West Virginia. When school started that fall, a pretty red-headed school teacher, Polly Layman (see George Layman family) caught his attention. He courted her ardently in person and in letters, and the next summer persuaded her to become engaged.

Married in Troutville in September, 1924, they lived in Bluefield and had one child, Patricia Elizabeth. Six month later came the Big Crash of October 1929. Minter had entered the insurance business in 1923, selling casualty insurance, primarily to coal companies. As the coal businesses floundered and went bankrupt, Minter's financial prospects took a downturn. In 1931 Pauline and "Patty" moved back to Troutville "for a few months" till the economy improved and Minter paid off some small debts. But Pauline's father was declining in health, the economy simply got worse and worse. In October 1932 Minter reluctantly sent the household furniture to Troutville and moved in with his family and his in-laws.

He helped with the family coal and tourist business and job hunted in Roanoke, which was somewhat less depressed than Bluefield. Pauline's father died the next year. Minter had finally found a job selling "industrial insurance" with a draw of \$15 a week. This meant that he went door to door in the poorer sections of town, both black and white, selling small policies and collecting weekly or monthly premiums of 25c or so. His customers earned no interest but it was a way of putting money aside that might have otherwise been spent and thus enabled them to build up a small reserve.

Over the next few years he found better jobs and about 1938 he went work for the Farm Bureau Insurance company selling automobile insurance. In 1944 he was named district sales manager for present-day Nationwide Insurance Company, a forerunner in offering mutual insurance. A born teacher who had learned to be a good salesman, Minter led his district to becoming one of the most productive in the region. He retired in May 1960, well-liked and highly respected by the men and women who worked for and with him.

Polly as her husband called her loved to sew, take care of the house, and work outside in the yard. Helping her mother with the family businesses and eventually taking them over left her little time for visiting with friends. Minter wrote her once that she was the "workingest little lady" he ever saw. She was disappointed when their young daughter Patty went off to school

and learned to read because “Patty is no longer so good about working around the house. She just wants to read.” Patty also liked to climb trees with nearby friends. As she grew a little older she discovered that her mother would forget about chores when she was out of sight and she learned to take very long baths because she could read undisturbed. She tried reading in trees too but discovered they were too uncomfortable. Something of a tomboy as a child, she fell out of her neighbor’s tree and broke her arm at age 3 1/2. Her father had just moved to Troutville. In elementary schooldays she spent as much time as possible tree climbing, roller skating and biking with friends – when she was not in the bathtub.

In the meantime Polly was having problems with headaches. Attempts to sew began to make her nervous. It was three years before the doctors were able to diagnose a brain tumor. Fortunately it was benign and not inside the brain, but it was the size of a tangerine. It was successfully removed in Charlottesville in May 1939, but left her with an impaired use of her right hand. Polly was gutsy and after several months of recovery was able to go back to work in her beloved garden. She gradually added more activities as she recovered and even learned to sew well though very slowly with her left hand. The tumor never reoccurred, but she did have to take medication to prevent seizures.

In the meantime Minter had taken an active interest in the development of Troutville, which was slowly being suburbanized. He was one of the first to push for incorporation in order to passing zoning ordinances to control the development of the town and to ensure its attractive appearance. Though it took a number of years to achieve his goals, Minter was elected to the first Troutville Town Council and served until advancing age made it impossible for him to carry out his duties effectively. Polly enjoyed Home Demonstration and Garden Club work and they both served as volunteers with local charitable organizations.

In 1958 they sold the old Layman house and built a smaller brick house on Sunset Avenue designed by Minter. Though he was always faithful in spirit to his Presbyterian heritage, Minter went regularly with Polly to the Troutville Church of the Brethren. He died in 1975 of heart failure and intestinal bleeding. At the funeral the church was packed with his many friends and neighbors. The most frequent comment people made about him was that he was “an old-fashioned Virginia gentleman and so much fun!”

Though Minter and Pauline did not share many interests, their values were similar and they both enjoyed playing games, especially bridge, going for afternoon rides, visits with friends and family, and watching the birds Polly fed at the dining room windowsill.

Patricia left home for college at the age of sixteen. After graduation she taught in Fairfax and Albemarle counties, married and attended graduate school. After the death of her husband, Albert Throssell Hickin, Jr., at an early age, she completed her Ph.D. in American History at the University of Virginia and taught at Ithaca College in New York state. After receiving tenure and a promotion to Associate Professor she received a major research grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities and a year’s leave from Ithaca College. A few months later she accepted a position as head of the Historical Publications Branch of the Virginia State Library.

In 1973 she received a biennial award from the Journal of Southern History for having the best article in the journal. She left the Library in 1974 to write a portion of a book on Fairfax County history for the Independence Bicentennial and to start her own research business, which she sold 11 years later to a subsidiary of Simon and Schuster. She traveled to Europe, took classes at a local university and has done a variety of volunteer work as well as researching all branches of her family history, an activity she loves because it enables her to know and keep in closer touch with cousins who live at a distance. And to become acquainted through the Internet with distant ones she'd never heard of.

In the meantime her mother was aging and living alone in Troutville. Polly's continued to bird watch and look after her yard. She especially loved listening to public radio. Even after arthritis meant she had to walk with a walker, she would drive to church and the grocery store and continue to go out to her yard. Frequent falls didn't deter her. But after she fell off her bedroom scales and fractured an ankle, she could no longer operate her aging Chevie. Much to the relief of her neighbors and family, she never drove again. The many kindnesses of neighbors, friends, and cousins enabled her to live at home until she was almost 89.

In 1988 she moved to Richmond to live with Patricia. There she became a much-beloved member of the West Richmond Church of the Brethren. Her new friends repeatedly commented on her beautiful smile and positive outlook. She still loved public radio, bird watching, and playing games with family and friends. After she could no longer walk, she entered a nursing home and died at The Windsor in Richmond at the age of 97. Despite her brain tumor, she had lived longer than any of her sisters (who died at the respectable ages of 88, 91, and 95).