

"I REMEMBER"

Send Your Memory In Today. Thanks!

By Our
Readers

Every reader of *The Kentucky Explorer*, no doubt, has a special memory. Why not write it down and share it here in this column? Help preserve the story of our vanishing past for today and tomorrow. We need memories and photographs from every part of Kentucky and beyond. Thanks!

Biography Of A County Store

The following was written by my father, Orson P. Smith.

The building still stands in Carter County, Kentucky. It isn't very sturdy. The porch dips too close to the ground, and there is a swag in the roofline. The paint is faded and peeling. It is locked, and I am told it is empty. It hasn't been a country store now for several years. The name Lum Terry and Sons is barely visible.

The store was started soon after my grandfather was killed in a mining accident in Arizona Territory in 1903. Since the store was located just below the old homeplace of my great-grand-

parents, the tragedy was discussed many times on the porch and around the stove in the store.

Many subjects were discussed in the store, because it was a common meeting ground for the local folks. Very few had telephones. There were no radios for a long time after this. There were newspapers, but most of the country folks didn't subscribe. The papers didn't cover much of the local news of Smith Branch. It was an unhurried time. When the ladies came in for their staples and yard goods, the men bought a few 16-gauge shells for their shotgun and some horseshoe nails, or some of this or that. Shopping was only a part of the visit to the store. There was visiting

with the neighbors and getting up to date on what was going on. The men might step behind the store for a friendly snort from the bottle. They had to sneak this, because the proprietor was a parttime Baptist preacher and wouldn't allow strong spirits.

When I saw the store years later, in the 1920s, the smells had been present long enough that they were thoroughly institutionalized. There was a wonderful mixed aroma that included sharp cheese, tobacco, yard goods, spices, herbs, overalls, leather, and the oil used on saddles and shoes alike. The gasoline didn't arrive for some time.

The generations of my family sat there and talked with each other and with the neighbors. The veterans of the Civil War and the Spanish-American War recalled their adventures when my Uncle Howard and others left for active duty in Europe. They were more than sympathetic when Howard was injured by the poison gas released by the Germans. Howard became the next member of the family to migrate to Arizona for the climate was kinder to his injured lungs. In the time before WWII, the old-timers talked of having to whip the Germans again. When war actually oc-



Becky Smith of Louisville, Kentucky, shares these photos with our readers. The photo above is a recent photo of the old Lum Terry General Store in Carter County, Kentucky (See "I Remember" above). The photo on the right is of Becky's grandparents, Marion L. Sturgell and Dora Nickell Sturgell, taken on their 64th wedding anniversary in August of 1969, in Lawrence County, Kentucky. They were the parents of nine children: Thelma, Vincent, Glenn, Ruby, Opal, Audrey, Millard, Alice, and Laura Frances (Becky's mother).



Our joys are only the tender shadows which our sorrows cast. --Henry Ward Beecher

curred it was with great sadness that the people on the porch and around the stove learned that Howard's son was lost on the Death March on Bataan. He was in the Philippines when war started.

They sat in the store and talked and wept when more tragedies were announced. In this store there were personal experiences recounted of combat in the Civil War, Spanish-American War, WWI, WWII, and the Korean War. Of course some of these adventures were before the store was opened. The store was closed before Vietnam. In these years the horses and mules were replaced by the car and truck.

The gasoline pumps were active. Strange city folks would stop by for gasoline. They were welcome to a drink of fresh water from the well. There was a gourd dipper. Sometimes these strangers and some local folks would ask if anyone knew what was wrong with their car. This brought the men from the porch, even if they were listening to Lowell Thomas and the news. The neighbors gathered on the porch daily for the news. However, they wished to be good neighbors. When the strangers left there might have been commentaries less than kind, but saturated with mountain wit.

It was not only the men who recounted their adventures. The women talked of their common chores in the family and garden. They wept together about their children who were ill with the dreadful flu of 1917, and those who died. Some of them lost children to whooping cough, diphtheria, typhoid, and other diseases that are now curable. Childbearing was a greater hazard at that time. Most of the women shared herbal remedies and general knowledge. Midwives delivered the babies. The doctor was called as a last resort.

Church was another community activity. It was the source of many of the long discussions in the store. Very lively discussions about politics kept the air alive with wit and wisdom. While the opinions differed there was not a killing instinct at the store. One would not want to win to the extent that a neighbor was driven away from the circle of discussion.

One of the neighbors did become serious enough about politics that he took his gun and went with others on a march on the state capitol when the Governor was killed during the swear-



Hazel Bucklen, 6010 Highway 147, Lake Almanor, CA 96137, shares this photo of (L-R) Mabel Vanhorn Shivel and Amy Vanhorn Ross, the daughters of Hense and Bertha Vanhorn. The photo was taken in Lawrence County, Kentucky, ca. 1925.

ing in ceremony, or was it just before or just after?

The store was there when my grandparents were newlyweds and later when my parents were married. Soon after I was married, I went by the store to report on my new status. I was later able to tell of the birth of most of my children. The proprietor lived to be almost 100 years old, and he kept a careful mental census of those of us who had any connection with Wilson Creek or Smith Branch. Even he couldn't live forever.

The store survived periods of want and plenty. Things were tough during the Great Depression, but there was a less decided change on Wilson Creek (Smith Branch) than in most places. These people had always been self-sufficient. They grew most of their own food and cut their own wood. They even dug some of their own coal from the many small mines close by.

A few of the descendants did well in the outside world. One was a gold medalist in the 1924 Olympics. He enjoyed coming "back home," staying on the farm, and sitting on the store porch or

sitting around the stove. Another became a doctor and had great respect for his roots. Many of the boys had worldwide experiences in the various wars, but there was always that strong urge to go home for a while and many stayed.

The building still stands. I hear it is empty, but, no, it could not be empty. It is filled with the memories of the Smith family and their neighbors for almost 100 years and with the stories of their adventures for many years before it opened.

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Memories Of Yesteryear

Years ago most people had little or no money. Coffins were made of pine, usually by neighbors who donated their time and sometimes their money to purchase the materials to make the coffin. The deceased would be laid out in their homes. Neighbors brought food and anything else that might be needed. They stayed up with the deceased and tried to comfort the family. A wake was held the night before the funeral. The wake simply was a service, a viewing of the body and comfort given to the deceased family. A prayer usually was in order. Neighbors and friends and sometimes members of the family dug the grave. Family, friends, and neighbors escorted the deceased to the cemetery. There a few words were said and a prayer as the deceased was viewed for the final time. They were then laid to rest. I have helped dig more graves and sat with the corpse on more occasions than I like to remember. It was a very sad and solemn time.

When I went into the Army during WWII, I was a mere lad that had never been away from home. It didn't take long to learn if you were from Kentucky, you were automatically "a dumb hill-billy."

I remember John Kelly. He built more schools, churches, and roads around Knott County than the state and county themselves built. I personally went to two schools that he built. My first year of school was on Clear Creek, across the hill from Lotts Creek in Knott County; and my second year and second school was on Lotts Creek, where Kelly Fork and Young Fork met.