

**Gladys Cox Williams said, *“By the time the school bus got to the mountain, it was so full that I just sat on my boyfriend’s lap all the way to Tracy...”***

**Written by Jackie Layne Partin**

Ninety-six years ago on April 2, 1911, Gladys Mae Cox was born at the family home near College Street in Monteagle, Tennessee. Her parents were William Houston Cox and Venner Cordelia Farris Cox. She was the second child of six born to the couple. Her siblings were Charles Howard, Francis Marion or “Gudge” as he was known by most people, Ford Wilson, Annie Laura, and Venner Cordelia. Her grandparents were Francis Marion and Barbara Ellen Layne Cox of Valley Home fame, and Dock and Bettie King Farris of Franklin County, TN. Bettie Farris died young, but Dock married again and was employed by the Sewanee Military Academy for many years. On several occasions I sat down with Gladys and picked away at her memories. She never once tired while relating what she recalled of Monteagle, Summerfield and points beyond.

During the big flu pandemic of 1917/18/19, Gladys remembered when several in her own family became ill. The William Bennett family, or as she called them the “Squire” Bennett family, who were neighbors, brought food to their house and put it in the window so as not to spread the flu virus. Millions all over the world died in that pandemic, so the Bennetts had acted wisely. Gladys remembered when her parents and she went down the Nick-a-Jack Trail to the Monroe Layne place to carry food. What a wonderful custom of carrying food to the sick or to a mourning family when there was a death. Many times it was the “have nots” who did the carrying to other “have nots”; what great spirit those hard-working people had! The Layne house was down under Forrest Point on the first flat of Laynes Cove, and she spoke of the house as being a long house with a long front porch. I was so interested in her description of the homeplace; then she said, “As a child, I thought it was a better house than the one we lived in on top.” I know my Layne ancestors had a hard life, but that little bit of information made me smile. I knew that most

all the Layne men in the Cove had wonderful carpentry and masonry skills. Once in the house Gladys spoke of several older people standing around the table where the food was placed. Monroe was my great-grandfather and had died in 1911 the year Gladys was born, but my great-grandmother Rebecca Jane was still alive around that time. When Gladys described the scene at the house, I envisioned a death gathering. Rebecca and her youngest child Buford Paskel Layne died around the time of that flu season. Some of Gladys' fondest memories include the yearly fourth of July trip down to the old Monroe Layne place with her father to pick berries. That old home site always seemed to have plenty of raspberry plants; I'd like to think that my grandfather Alex Layne planted them there when he was a boy since he also had some in his garden on King Street when he lived on top of the plateau.

William Houston Cox and Rebecca Jane Cox Layne were cousins. Their Cox grandfathers, Nathan and David Cox respectively, were brothers from Georgia who moved into the area that became Grundy County, Tennessee. Their descendants spread out over the Pelham Valley area. This may have been the reason that William was drawn to the old Monroe Layne place. Rebecca had lost her husband, all four of her daughters, one son and her mother-in-law, Elender Tennessee Layne, in just a few short years. Hopefully, William and Venner Cox felt her burdens and were there to lend consolation and encouragement.

Venner Cox's mother Bettie King Farris had given birth to a son Reese and then her daughter. After Bettie's death the King side of the family took Venner to rear in the Midway community. Gladys recalls her mother's story of boarding the train in Midway for trips to Tracy City for piano lessons. When Venner married and had a family, she made certain that her children were exposed to music by acquiring an organ for her home. In the first years of their marriage, William pleaded with Venner to move to the Valley which was home to him, and they did. After a couple of years, she told him that she was going back to the mountain; as Gladys stated smilingly, "*Of course*, they moved back to Monteagle." William told his family that before he and their mother married that he went to Texas and taught school there for a while. Gladys said at one time he was a constable or something to do with the law,

and he carried a pistol. He farmed and sold produce on the Monteagle Assembly Grounds where he also delivered ice.

In the midst of the terrible flu outbreak, Gladys began her schooling at the Monteagle School on King Street. When asked if she walked to school or her dad took her in a wagon, her response was, "I walked every step of the way!" Then I asked, "Even if there was a big snow?" "Yes, we walked to school in the rain and deep snow. The janitor (*probably a Mr. S. Adams*) had the school all warm for us." Like me when I attended school on the Marion County side between 1948 and 1956, Gladys walked the railroad tracks. She probably had the same adventures as I did. We had to wait until the train went on through before we could hop on the rails. We saw our share of beheaded dogs on the tracks, fell down a good number of times while balancing on the rails, and made the great decision as to what entrance/exit path we would take—the one in front of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church or the one in front of King Street. She and the other students made little cone-shaped cups from a sheet of paper for drinking water, but later each child had his own metal cup. My uncle, Alex Benson "Dude" Layne, noted that sometimes they were sent to the well at Charlie and Ella Mankin's house (*now the Johnny Brannan home*) to get water for the students. Lunches were wrapped, as Gladys recalls, and consisted of "whatever was left from breakfast...a biscuit, sausage or whatever." Three teachers who came to mind were "George Partin, John Goforth and Macy Francis, Jim Francis' wife." Her eighth grade teacher during the 1924/25<sup>th</sup> school year was Mr. Ray Ingman. Her certificate was signed by J. L. Rollings who was the County Superintendent of Schools at the time. Mr. Rollings was married to Gladys' aunt, Pearl Cox. An interesting thing that I had never heard before, and admittedly she was cloudy on this point, was that the house across the street was at one time used as a kitchen where the girls were taught to cook. I assumed that she spoke of the one which later became the Wilburn Sampley house.

On 4 Nov. 1923 at home in Monteagle, Gladys' mother died after being sick for nine days following the birth of her daughter Venner, who was later called "Veda". Her death certificate states the cause of death as "Intestinal...related to childbirth". As a child, Gladys remembers that her

mother died of acute indigestion, and that E. C. Norvell was the undertaker. At home her mother was laid out in the casket a few hours before her funeral; burial was in the Summerfield Cemetery. Sadly, this left William alone to rear six children. Gladys was only twelve and had to step into the role of a mother until someone could be found to help. Baby Venner needed the immediate care of a mother, so a couple named John and Minnie Yates took care of her while she was a baby. Minnie was a sister to Venner Cordelia's stepmother Annie. Not long after they took the child, Minnie Yates died, and John took the baby to Birmingham, Alabama to live. When William found this out, he went to Birmingham, but came back without the baby. A few weeks later, John Yates brought the baby back to her family in Monteagle. The family was so happy to have its daughter and sister back home. Emotions ran high where Mr. Yates was concerned, but in the end there were no hard feelings about the situation; William even took John Yates into his home for a couple of years. It may have been that Mr. Yates was so attached to the baby, and after the sudden death of his wife, he clung to the child out of love. An older lady named Mrs. Brown came to live with the Cox family to help care for the children. Gladys said that her father could have walked off and left his children, but he didn't. Fondly, she remembers that at night he helped them all with their homework and preparation for school the next day. As in any family, she said there were problems from time to time, but they all stayed together as a family.

Upon completion of elementary school, Gladys attended school at Shook School in Tracy City for two years. At first she had to pay for her ride to school. On the same side of the street as the Merriman family house, very near the DuBose Center in Monteagle, there was a station house for the railroad, and this is where she caught the train for the ride to Tracy City. Because of the Great Depression of those years, it was a privilege to attend high school. After two years at Shook, she went to the newly built Grundy County High School. A school bus was furnished, but by the time the Valley students were gathered, and the bus got to Monteagle, there wasn't enough room for everyone. Gladys said happily, "I just sat on my boyfriend's lap all the way to Tracy... until word got out that some of us were doing this." Suffice to say that Gladys thought the young man was mighty handsome, but not someone

she would have married. The decision was made to have a Mr. Jones (*could have been William or Cedrick Jones*) from Tracy City drive down to gather the leftover students along the roadside in Monteagle and Summerfield in one of his vehicles. Then he unloaded at the High School. Needless to say, some of her favorite classmates were three first cousins who were all in the same grade with Gladys. These four grandchildren of Francis Marion and Barbara Layne Cox were Gladys, Zelma, and Tressie Cox, and Florence Rollings. Zelma was a daughter of James "Jim" Cox; Tressie's father was Robert Cox, and Florence's mother was Pearl Cox Rollings. In 1930 the four cousins graduated from high school together. Their pictures are recorded in the third volume of the Mountain Laurel, their high school annual.

Of particular interest are Gladys' memories of her Cox grandparents; she told of one visit to their home in the Valley around 1916 for a big birthday reunion for her grandfather, Francis Marion Cox. She said there were lots of people at the party. Her grandparents were well-known citizens of the Valley Home community where they lived in Cox's Hollow near what is the Butch Goodman homeplace now. Barbara Ellen Cox was a mid-wife for the area and a strong, hard working lady with deep family ties. According to her great-grandson Jimmy Rogers, when Barbara heard that her husband Frank was gravely injured in the Civil War at Murfreesboro, she arranged care for her children and took off on foot to find and care for him. When she found him, he had not been injured, but he was caring for an injured brother. Another memory from Gladys was when her brother Francis Marion/Gudge was born, her grandmother Barbara Ellen came up from the Valley to help Venner with the new baby. Gladys has vivid memories of the long dresses Barbara wore. Barbara died in 1923, and her husband died in 1925.

And then there was the time when Gladys and one of her brothers climbed into the wagon and rode up to Tracy City to a KKK meeting. When she told this, her niece's mouth and mine fell open in dismay, and she quickly responded, "Well, it was an advertised public meeting!" I felt certain that her mother must have been dead by that time because she probably would have never allowed her daughter to go to such a meeting. Gladys confirmed that it was after the death of her mother. When asked if the Klansmen's identities

were truly kept secret, she said that she didn't know who was under the robes. A vivid memory for her was eating her first ice cream that day. She said it caused her to have a terrible headache, so much so, that she never ate it again until recent years.

According to Gladys, Claramont Castle, as we used to call it, was built originally as the home of Dr. Oliver D. Mabee with mountain stones from Laynes Cove. It is still standing and is now called High Point. I asked Gladys to start at DuBose School and walk me down College Street pass the buildings on the way to the Assembly entrance. As she recalled the house on the corner was the Lautzenheiser home, and "Mr. Lautzenheiser worked as the plumber/janitor for the Dubose School." Next came the Lowe residence, a vacant lot, another house, the Mankin home, the Blackwood home, another house, the Hassler home (*later the Clyde Bennett home*), the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, the Frank Lautzenheiser house (*which may have become the Richmond house*) and Dr. David Bryan's home (*she thinks this house may have had Holcombs in it at one time.*) It became the Methodist Parsonage at some point. Then came a barn (*maybe part of a livery stable owned by the Mankin family*), a small house which set back and belonged to Sim and Josephine Cook Layne, and two houses—one the Wallace home which she thought may have been Tubby Wallace's parents home and the other a large house with a balcony. Then crossing Central Avenue, there were the Monteagle Hotel, Jim Francis' grocery, then the New York Store/Pharmacy operated by the Hassler family with the Post Office at the back of the same building, another house, then the George Partin family home, the Assembly entrance and finally the train depot.

I told her of a large, abandon, two-storied house that I used to wander through as a child; all the neighborhood kids thought it was haunted. It stood on or near the spot where the new Monteagle City Hall is now. My uncle told me of a kindergarten which stood in that area years ago, and I wondered if that house may have been the same one. Gladys said that was a possibility because there were two ladies who operated a house called "The King's Daughter" in that area. She remembered a specific case where the children

were being abused, and the authorities were taken to the two ladies who cared for them.

When asked who her closest friends were in her youth, she said, "Tressie McFarland (*Aylor*) and Lucy Marlow who married a Lautzenheiser, I think. Tressie had a sister named Nora who worked in a private home." I responded by saying, "Nora McFarland Custer was one of the kindest Christian ladies that I have ever known." Gladys quickly agreed. At some point in time, Ruth Bennett, Clyde's wife, had a car, but couldn't drive it, so Gladys, who herself knew little about cars, would drive the car for her. It sounded as if they had plenty of fun.

I have always wondered how many different addresses one could call for mail throughout the years of Moffat Station, Moffat, Mont Eagle or Monteagle. Gladys said that the post office was at the back of the New York Store when she was a child, and Harriett Lappin was the postmaster; it was on the east side of Ward Lacy's Drugstore (*the New York Store*) when I was a child, and Charlie Fults was the postmaster. Later it was moved to the west of Greeters and then at its present place across from the May Justus Library in Marion County. According to another historian, the first Post Office was in the vicinity of where the Foutch Hotel was some years ago. The second was in the Post House owned by Dr. Porter and later by the George Partin family.

The Cox family attended church at the Methodist Church over in Summerfield. It stood on the acreage with the cemetery. According to the book John Gamp pp. 123/24, one might get the feeling that the little meeting house itself was called "Old Summerfield". Gladys' father taught Sunday School there at the time his wife died. She recalled her father and brother Howard got logs and stripped them for repairs or additions on the old building. Probably, the area where the Summerfield Cemetery, the Summerfield School, Highlander Folk School and points beyond were located, was at one time known as the old "Bazille" Summers' field. Hence Layne was the preacher when Gladys was young. She believes that Mr. Summers donated the land for the church and the cemetery for the people of that area so that they could bury their loved ones together without cost. I

remember a story told where one parent had been buried at Summerfield in the family plot, and when the other parent died, the gate was locked so that the family member could not be buried until a certain sum of money was paid. Since the burial plot had several bodies from years past and had a distinct handmade boundary, the local people felt that the plot had always belonged to the family and should be opened for this final burial. The lock on the gate was cut, the grave was dug in the night and the burial took place the next day without incident.

Some of the oldest unmarked graves in the cemetery are my Layne ancestors; some of them married into the Cox lineages. The Laynes who are buried there were descendants of John and Esther Kilgore Layne who, I believe, are buried there also. It just seemed appropriate to come up out of the cove below and bury their loved ones on high ground. During the talk of the old church near the cemetery, Gladys just spit out the name of Dr. Lillian Johnson who lived in a big house across the road near the cemetery. When asked who she was and what she was doing in that area, she responded with, "I don't know, but she 'ruled the roost'." For those who may not know, it was Dr. Lillian Johnson who gave the land for the Highlander Folk School which came into Summerfield later. She probably was also instrumental in bringing Claudia Lewis down to the area around 1945 to study and then compare New York kindergarten children to the same age children on the plateau in Summerfield. Ms. Lewis wrote a book, Children of the Cumberland, about her experiences here. It, like the book, John Gamp, is still even today being discussed with mixed feelings. I guess the reader's prospective on either book was determined by which side of the fence he or she lived.

Gladys' first job was working for Harriet Brush on the Assembly for \$5.00 a week. After graduation she went to Chattanooga, and she along with two girlfriends went to Miami to work as waitresses. Not long after, she received a telegram to come back to Chattanooga to a good waitress position. This is how she met her future husband George Wesley Williams. The couple married and eventually opened their own restaurant in Chattanooga. It was called the Williams Restaurant. Gladys and George had no children, but they helped many children along the way. One interesting story she told was about the

young newspaper boys who had to rise so early each morning to make their deliveries. The Williams would let the boys, when they finished their routes, come into their restaurant and sleep on the benches until time to go to school. The restaurant became Gladys and George's life until their retirement.

George passed on several years ago, and Gladys says she has outlived most of her friends, all of her classmates and many of her family. Gladys comes through Monteagle from time to time. Relatives drive her around town so that she can recall memories that have been tucked away for years. Monteagle is different; for some it is for the better; for others, the quaint little town of yesteryears is no more. They call it progress. Only time will tell. One thing is certain, Gladys Cox Williams and I still hold this little town close to our hearts.

If anyone has corrections or additions to Gladys' story, please feel free to email them to me at < [jackiepartin@blomand.net](mailto:jackiepartin@blomand.net) > .