

## “I Just Cried and Cried” When I Had to Quit School

### *A Talk With Anna Leigh Gossett Lowrie Shearin*

Written by Jackie Layne Partin

On 26 January 2009, I visited with the lady on Fairmount Curve— you know, the lady with the huge, beautiful, old maple—that royal benefactor of color that seems to light up the east end of Monteagle each autumn. Anna Leigh Gossett was born 15 June 1920 in Pikeville, Tennessee; she proudly states that she is eighty-eight years of age. Her parents were Jim and Myrtle Bedweoo Gossett. Of course, I had to have her spell her mother’s last name because it was a new surname for my hearing. I think the name came to be spelled Bedwell somewhere down the line, but Ann, as she is known by her friends, had quickly spoken and spelled the name as Bedweoo. Her mother, Myrtle, was born in 1897 to John and Elizabeth Whittenburg Bedwell who lived in Bledsoe County, TN. Ann believes that her Whittenburg family had American Indian blood in its midst, but pausing to think for a moment, she stated that none of the Whittenburgs ever came calling at her door, so she doesn’t know for sure.

Ann’s father’s family, the Gossetts, came from over around Dayton, TN. Census records show that the family also lived in Montgomery and Cheatham Counties. When I asked her who her Gossett grandparents were, she wasn’t quite sure, but a quick search on the internet gave me the names James and Bobbie Gossett. Their son James, or Jim, as he was better known, was born in September 1891 according to the 1900 Census record. Ann never had the privilege of knowing her paternal grandparents since they died before she was born. We often speak of how extended families lived close to each other in the “old days,” and this made for wonderful, lasting, grandparent memories—like the “Waltons” on television. However, it was no different then than it is now. Families then, maybe were mobile for different reasons than those of today, but they still got into their covered wagons, on their mules, or on a train and went from one side of this continent to the other; this made for broken, family chains where the members often never saw each other again. Ann was about three when her parents decided to make a move away from family and friends; some would never be heard from again.

Jim Gossett moved his family from Pikeville where they were living at the time, to Franklin County near St. Andrews School on top of the plateau near Sewanee. He accepted a job on the farm at the school that included caring for animals and raising crops. Ann believes that a place was furnished for them to live in on the campus. She

had plenty of companionship with her sisters, Minnie Ruth, Beulah Mae, Edith, Emma Grace and Bessie; the girls attended school at St. Andrews. Times were hard on everyone, for this was during the peak of the Great Depression; Ann remembered much of her childhood as being work, work and more work.

Soon Jim Gossett moved his family to Monteagle. At first the family lived in a small house near the Foutch Hotel, but when a nearby, larger house became vacant, the family took advantage of the extra room and moved in. Thankfully, school was just across the railroad track on King Street, so she and her sisters didn't have far to walk. Ann's mother thought that her children had not learned enough while going to school at St. Andrews, so she had the principal at Monteagle put the children back a year. With disgust in her face, Ann stated that she had to repeat the fourth grade. Howard Sanders was the principal, and Eloise Partin was her first teacher. Ms. Partin and Sarah Campbell Speegle were two "tough" teachers, but Ann liked both of them. She thought that Rose Raulston was a "pretty" teacher; we all usually have at least one pretty teacher throughout our school years—mine was a Mrs. Carden, my third grade teacher; I never knew her full name, but I remember that her husband was a coach, and he was nearly too tall to come through the classroom door.

Jim Gossett cut "bug wood" at first to help care for his family. Later, Lem Wallace who operated a gas station in front of Foutch's Store, got Jim interested in the garage/gas station field. From then on out, Jim operated stations around town for their owners. Ann recalled the Foutch Hotel, the Wallace Gas Station, the City Café, the Rob Francis Store, the Jim Francis Store, the old Monteagle Post Office with Harriet Lappin as the postmistress, Ed Hall's beer joint, and even the graveyard west of the old Monteagle Depot, and I remembered that there seemed to have always been a "Jim Gossett gas station" somewhere in Monteagle.

The Monteagle School building was heated with a large stove that Ann thought was extra tall. When I asked her who the janitor was, she thought that the children did a lot of the janitorial duties. She knew for certain that her job was to keep the floor swept. Across the street from the school was a lunchroom of sorts. She remembered that soups mainly were served. Her best friend in school was Almetta Smith, daughter of Howard and Gladys Smith. When I asked her what kind of games they played, she said, "Annie Over," then she took a long breath, and stated that she just didn't play much—she worked all day, twelve hours a day when she wasn't in school. This was the case in many large families during those difficult economical years. Some young people today

make fun of the older folks when they start talking about “living through the Great Depression.” If the present day (2009) economy doesn’t improve, those same young ones might just be forced to “live through a Great Depression” of their own.

Unlike so many students today, Ann loved school. One of the worse days of her life was when her mother took her out of school and sent her to work for Ella Meeks Wallace, wife of Lem. Ann said, “I just cried and cried; I loved school.” Her job at the City Café was washing dishes—a job she will never forget. She thought she was about twelve when she started. Lem and Ella owned the café that sat on the Marion County side of the tracks just across Central Avenue from Foutch’s Store and Lem Wallace’s Gas Station. She gave her little earnings to her mother, but in retrospect, the thought came to her that she should have kept her own money and not been so easily manipulated. Ann was conscious of hard times and did what she thought was right. After working at the City Café, she then started working at the Bennett Café just down the street. Later, she worked for Clara Shoemate at the Blue Sky Restaurant. When Clara moved down on the side of the mountain, Ann followed her. She remembered working with my mother Clara Meeks Layne at Clara’s Restaurant.

Later Jim and Myrtle Gossett moved across the railroad tracks into Grundy County, but Ann stayed in Marion County for a while. Her parents lived in another large two-story house. Ann’s nephew Jimmy Ray Sampley fondly remembered playing for hours on the upper balcony of his grandparents’ old house. In March 1947, her parents’ house burned along with the Bennett house next door. There was only a driveway between the two older, wooden houses, so it was difficult to save either. Mr. Jim Gossett had just filled his coalhouse with a new supply of coal that caused the fire to burn a long time in that area.

On 23 December 1939, Anna Leigh Gossett married Harold Lappin Lowrie. Carmon King, a childhood friend of Harold’s, was with them when they got their license. He was a son of Daniel Cicero and Pearl Sanders King who lived on the northwest corner of Lee and 2<sup>nd</sup> Streets. Sheepishly, Ann announced that she had been “courting” Harold, who was several years her senior, for some years. Maybe not known to Anna at the time, she had married into one of the oldest families in Monteagle.

Harold’s grandfather, John Lowrie, came from Scotland via Ohio, and by the time that the 18 July 1870 Census was taken, he was living in Franklin County, Tennessee with his second wife Sarah Smartt Gilliam and these children: Ellen (18), Mary (15),

John (9), Martha (7) and Lem (4). Since the Census record shows that Ellen and Mary were born in Ohio, and John was born in Tennessee, then we can assume that John moved his family to Tennessee and married Sarah between 1855 and 1861. The closest post office was at Cowan, so this is probably where he established his family while he worked as a laborer on the railroad. Since this was just about the time John Moffat decided to establish a village and name it Moffat Station, and since the railroad had just about twelve years earlier been extended from the Sewanee area out further on the plateau to a little town called Tracy City, I surmise that John and Sarah felt it safe and feasible to move their large family into the new little village on the plateau. You might say that the Lowries were pioneering the wilderness that became known as Monteagle. The house on the curve was started and completed between 1870 and 1880. This may well have been the time that John and Sarah planted the little cedar sapling that is now huge and still standing on the property—if only trees could talk! During the gathering of the 1880 Census data, John's vocation was listed as a "farmer," but his son John Gilliam Lowrie was working as a telegraph operator. John and Sarah's son Lemuel Pleasant Lowrie was Harold's father and Mary Caroline Lappin Lowrie was his mother. Lemuel did not marry young, so this may be why the old homestead was handed down to him. Mary Caroline, better known as "Mamie," came out of the Idalbert Lappin family, some of whom are interred in the Lappin Cemetery by the new flea market in Monteagle.

In 1939, a year after Lemuel Lowrie's death, his son Harold and new wife Ann moved into the big, Lowrie family house that stood on the Fairmount Curve in Monteagle. I have vivid memories of that old house as I was privileged to view it every day on my ride on the school bus to Grundy County High School. I can't exactly say what it was that fascinated me about the house, but I never go around that curve that I don't think about it. It was an unpainted lapboard type house, but it just seemed fitting that it should not be covered with paint; that would have taken away the aura of the old dwelling. Carpentry was in the blood of the Lowrie men, so building the huge old house probably came natural to the ancient ones. According to Ann, originally, there were ten acres in the homestead, but John Lowrie traded five acres of his land to the DuBose School (*probably Fairmount School for Girls at that time*) in exchanged for an education for his daughter Martha Elizabeth Lowrie. Martha, too, was older when she married Dr. David Hampton Bryan after his first wife Fannie Brixey Bryan died. Later, more land was sold until Ann now lives on one acre.

Harold and Ann became the parents of three children—James/Jim, Bob, and Patricia/Pat Lowrie. Jim was born in Sewanee, but Bob and Pat were born in the old house because Ann wasn't given enough warning to get to Dr. Brewer's office which was in the old Julius Hassler/Clyde Bennett house. Dr. Brewer came to his patient on those two occasions. Thankfully he didn't have far to go. Ann got a joy out of telling the story about the "birthing event" when her son Bob was born. The family cow was trying her best to have a calf, an old stray dog was having pups under the floor, and she was in labor with Bob—all at the same time. What a day, what a day!!

Ann, her son Jim and I had talked before about the old Lowrie house. They both had a lot to say then. I couldn't help but laugh at the stories they told that day, but there really was nothing funny about a cold, *very cold*, old house where the cutting of winter wood was a never-ending task. Ann saw her share of cold winters in that old house, and her sons cut their fair share of hickory wood with a crosscut saw for the old stoves and fireplace scattered throughout its nine rooms. Jim told me that his mother got the old flat irons out each winter night, heated them on a stove, and then put them in the bed with him and his brother Bob. All individuals in the household had some kind of wood heat in their rooms except the boys; Jim remembered that his mother had so much "covers" on his bed that he could hardly turn over at night. He and Ann remembered the crates, fireplace, "warm mornings" and old wood cook stove that were scattered throughout the antiquated house. Why-y-y, enough heat went up the chimney of the old fireplace to heat several rooms, but that's the way it was back then. Even I can remember as a child how hard it was to leave my position backed up to the pot-bellied stove, then run through the darkness, jump into a cold, cold bed hoping, as Jerry Clowers once said, that my mother hadn't changed the furniture around that day. As difficult as it was, it was well worth the chills and dread once the body got snuggled deep down into the feather bed with its heavy quilts.

Ann and Harold later built the house that she now lives in. The old house was torn down room by room starting in 1959. She is proud of the beautiful knotty-pine paneling in her newer house; she sanded and varnished it herself. For a period of time, Mamie Lowrie also lived in the new house with them. They had built a small front porch, and in pleasant weather someone in the family was always sitting outside watching the traffic flow in and out of Monteagle.

Sadly in 1977, Harold Lappin Lowrie passed away. Several years later, Ann met a friend of Ray Summers who worked in the insurance business. His name was Art

Shearin. She was smitten by this fine man, and later they were married. He was a good man and made Ann a good husband. Art was not healthy and after a long period of illness, he passed away five years into the marriage. Like many family members before him, Art took to the front porch when he needed to rest; this is what he was doing when he slipped quietly into eternity. Ann has taken his place on the porch when weather permits. She made it clear that Art was a wonderful man, but the last thing she told me before we decided to break from our memories was, “Your first husband means more to you.”

(Ann, nor I, can put total trust in our memories. If we have the facts wrong, we will be glad to make note of that. [jackiepartin@blomand.net](mailto:jackiepartin@blomand.net) )



John Lowrie born 1820 in Scotland



Anna Leigh Gossett (Lowrie) (Shearin)--2009



The old John Lowrie house on Fairmount Curve. The front of the house originally faced what is now “The Bridge Nursing Home.” Pictured are William Lowrie, his wife Charlene Thomas Lowrie and their daughter Billie Faye Lowrie. (ca. 1948)



Johnny and Beulah Mae Gossett Jones sitting on the rock wall in front of the Bennett house that burned in 1947.



This is the Gossett house on College St. that burned in 1947. L to R: Beulah Mae Gossett, Herbert Brannan, Edith Gossett, and Jim Gossett