

Of Times, Places, and People

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As I searched through the new Grundy County Cemetery Book, I found so many of the older families that I had wondered about - wondered where they were laid to rest. Now, with the aid of the book I no longer have to wonder about many of them. Of course some are buried in unmarked graves that will never be identified, but this cemetery book committee tried to find everyone that they could. I think of Sue Scott, who researched a lot of the cemeteries included in the book, but Sue died just as the book was coming out. The book is dedicated to her. Sue was a tenacious researcher who could not be deterred. If information was available about the people she was researching, she would find it. I want to tell you about one of the families in the book and about my experiences during that time.

One family I came across was the early Samuel Werner family who moved to what is now known as the Werner Farm just out Dutchtown Road from where I live. In the early 1900's lots of farming went on out there where they had a large barn and a large dug out cellar to store potatoes, vegetables, and fruit during the cold winter months. The Werners, like many farmers, were self-sufficient. By the 1920's the family bought a second home nearer to town. I and my family thought their house was one of the prettiest in the whole town of Tracy City. Soon after the move to town, mining was the new business venture for the Werners with the opening of Big Hill and Little Hill mines. Then there was the Werner Lumber Company that grew larger than most companies around our area. The Werner Lumber Company employed over half of my mother's family during those early years. Some men worked at both the lumber company and the coal mines.

As their businesses grew, we began to see Werner property signs for miles and miles, and their land holding became very significant in Grundy County. In fact, in more modern days, we have benefitted from some of those lands that were donated for parks in the South Cumberland.

After the 1930's the Werner Mill shut down, and people in Tracy City nearly starved to death because jobs were very hard to find. Some were fortunate enough to get a job in the coal mines. My dad was one of those fortunate people. We were able to get by in those hard economic times when it was difficult to come by everyday supplies like flour, meal, sugar, coffee, lard, beans, and salt. My family didn't get electricity until the late 1940's. We had no school buses, so walking to school was just considered exercise for us children. We took it like a daily meal.

School was one of my special places I liked to go. Maybe others felt differently, but I enjoyed it. Seeing my class mates and teachers was a joy for me. Schooling wasn't a costly burden for my parents for we had our books furnished. All we needed was a tablet, notebook paper, pencils, and a few extra things throughout the year. Dad and Mom, like many parents, couldn't have afforded much in those early days. Mom saw to it that we were neat and clean while Daddy kept busy mining and bringing home a little payday to keep our family going. Sometimes on cold winter days our car wouldn't start, so he would set out walking the two miles to town where he could catch a ride on out to the mines. Often when he came home from his day at the mines he would be black with coal dust. Mom waited on him and fixed his supper. He would eat, then fix his bath before bedtime.

Long before his death, Dad would take the family to visit the places we had lived in earlier years. Things certainly changed over the years. The Werners' beautiful home places fell into disrepair after Mr. Werner died. Dad felt that to be such a loss to himself and to the town of Tracy City. Today, not only has the Werner home been lost, but many others have been as well.

I love the old houses and almost anything that reminds me of the accomplishments of the people of an earlier time. Houses have history, memories for both those who have lived there and for those who have existed in the places where they are located. I still see them in my mind's eye like they were in their heyday with fresh paint, flowers in the yard, some with fences around the perimeter. Preservation of things from our ancestors' times just seems like a natural thing to do. And that brings me to another point in my reminiscence. One way respect for those who have made our world what it is today can be shown through keeping our cemeteries neat and clean and the graves marked. I hope that we will continue to do that where it is being done now and that those little neglected, overgrown cemeteries will be noticed and will be resurrected into places where our ancestors can be memorialized and respected.