

- **May 21, 1981**

A VISIT WITH JOHN CALVIN YOAKUM: Part 1

By Nell Quesenbery

Claiborne County Progress

Late in the evening, looking out of my front window, I could see a fine luxury car parked in front of my parent's house. When the phone rang, I knew that it would be my mother, calling to tell me that her old schoolmate and cousin, Dick Yoakum of Morristown, Tennessee, was visiting Lone Mountain. He wanted to see me.

This evening, entering my parent's living room, I could see Dick seated on their scarlet couch amidst a mass of papers. However, it was Dick's appearance that most caught my attention. His tanned face was handsome and unlined beneath a full growth of meticulously barbered grey hair. Dick has remarkable long-lashed lavender blue eyes, which see everything, only appearing sleepy and indifferent to the casual observer. Yet, it was his wonderfully tailored black suit I noticed most. The brilliant black cloth was woven from the finest of light blended wool. A single, bright red thread cleverly wove itself along the collar and lapel of the coat.

Seated on the couch beside Dick, he began relating to me his adventures earlier in the day with John Calvin Yoakum of Powell's Valley, Tennessee. The many papers strewn about the couch, were copies of John Calvin Yoakum's history of the Yoakums of Claiborne County, Tennessee.

Today was the result of a wish I'd expressed to Dick a few weeks before. I asked his help in learning more about our ancestors. He looked at me speculatively for a moment before replying, "I may know a man who can tell you something."

Dick greatly enjoyed the visit with our Powell's Valley cousin, John Calvin Yoakum. He planned to visit John Calvin again, soon at his Middlesboro, Kentucky, home. Feeling John Calvin and I would enjoy meeting each other, Dick asked me to go with him on his return visit. I agreed readily to the trip.

Finally, it became time for Dick to leave us, cross over the Clinch Mountain and return home to Morristown, Tennessee. He left the "Yoakum Papers" with me.

Late that night, Dick wrote me a letter from Morristown. Many times, Dick's letters to me took the form of little stories. His title for my letter was - "A Visit With John Calvin Yoakum" and a trip to the Yoakum's Graveyard at Yoakum's Chapel in Powell's Valley. The following is Dick's letter: *Wednesday, September 15, 1977 Morristown, Tennessee*

I got up early this morning, for me, and ate some Grape-nuts cereal, got in my car and headed toward Middlesboro, Kentucky. It was a beautiful sunny day, giving no inkling that it was going to rain rather hard later on.

A few days before I had been over to John Calvin Yoakum's and he had been kind enough to lend me a sheaf of papers that Mrs. Earl Kincaide had sent him. She was a Missouri Yoakum whose pedigree reached back into Tennessee and intertwined with the Powell's Valley and Lone Mountain Yoakums. The woman had worked long and hard to preserve the Yoakum history and those of us who care are deeply indebted to her.

I had my good friend, Stanley Pat Moore, make copies of John Calvin Yoakum's material on the Xerox machine.

John Calvin had promised me that he would go with me down into Powell's Valley when I came back with his papers. I was looking forward to a lot of Yoakum lore.

When I first got to John's house this morning, there were locks on the door. I was very disappointed and really didn't know what to do with John's papers. Fortunately, a woman came out of the house next door. I asked her if she knew of John Calvin's whereabouts. He was out back pulling weeds from a plot he'd plowed the day before, explained the woman.

John Calvin was ready to go to Powell's Valley as quickly as he could clean the mud from his shoes and wash his hands. He reminded me that he couldn't move hardly as fast as he used to, since he had reached ninety-four.

He also told me that the woman next door who helped me find him was his grandson, Kenneth Wilson's wife. Kenneth Wilson ran the Sand W Parts Place on the east end of Middlesboro.

At the Yoakum graveyard, in Powell's Valley, we met a fellow named Welch. He was going to sow some grass seed on the grave of Guy Yoakum's father. Guy lived in Monroe, Michigan, and had asked Mr. Welch to do him a favor. Mr. Welch said Guy's mother had married again and lived in Knoxville, that she was in good shape for ninety-four years old - same age as John Calvin, who knew her. There was a cripple fellow cleaning the graveyard and pulling grass from around tombstones. He turned out to be a Yoakum, Otis, son of Melvin, son of Taylor, etc. etc.

We had moved into the heart of the graveyard. John sat down on the corner of a rectangular tomb upon which the elements and time had taken its toll. It was a very weather-beaten thing about three feet by six feet which protruded about two and one half feet out of the ground. John explained that it was the first grave that was put there, that it was his ancestor, Isaac Yoakum.

Then John Calvin went on to tell me that during the Civil War, his grandpa, Marcellius Yoakum (son of Isaac and Martha Davis Yoakum) hid his meat in Isaac's grave under the large rock slab, so the Rebs would not confiscate it. The inscription on the rectangular slab covering Isaac's grave had long since been obliterated.

About this time the heavy rains came.

Dick's letter to be concluded next week.

Dick and I discovered all the Claiborne County, Tennessee, Yoakums are descended from the founders of Yoakum's Station, Powell's Valley, Tennessee. They were George and Margaret Van Bebber Yoakum. Their children were Isaac, Peter, George, Felix, Robert (Lone Mountain Yoakums), Margaret and Nancy.

Their son, Isaac Yoakum (John Calvin's great-grandfather) married Martha Davis. Their children were George, Aaron, Thomas, Marcellius, Elizabeth (married James Van Bebber, Ray County, Missouri) and John (Ray County, Missouri).

Isaac and Martha Yoakum's son, Marcellius (John Calvin's grandfather) had four wives. David M. Yoakum (John Calvin's father) was descended from Marcellius and his first wife, Sarah Anne Cawood. The other children of Marcellius and his four wives were: Stephen, Mary, Rhoda, Barbara, Winna, James, Sarah, William, Louisa, John, Margaret, Nancy, Josiae and Fannie.

The mother of our common ancestors, Margaret Van Bebber Yoakum, was also a Davis. Margaret was kinswoman to her son, Isaac's wife, Martha Davis.

MAY 28, 1981

A VISIT WITH JOHN CALVIN YOAKUM: Part 2

By Nell Quesenberg

Claiborne County Progress

Dick Yoakum's visit to Lone Mountain did not surprise me. Dick had written me earlier on Monday that he'd visited John Calvin Yoakum that Sunday. He said he had the "Yoakum Papers" borrowed from John Calvin. Soon he planned to bring me a copy.

In Monday's letter, Dick had written that our Powell Valley cousin, John Calvin Yoakum, was about ninety-four years old. He said, "John Calvin Yoakum talked a 'mile a minute,' was full of energy and still a hard worker." He also expressed his opinions fully and freely, delighting Dick with his outspokenness.

On Wednesday, Dick traveled to Middlesboro to return John Calvin's papers. They then drove to Powell's Valley, Tennessee, where they visited Yoakum's Chapel and Cemetery. Heavy rains cut their visit to Powell's Valley short. Later, Wednesday evening, Dick stopped by Lone Mountain to visit with my parents, Denny and Louise Marchio. He also gave me a copy of the "Yoakum Papers."

The following is the conclusion of Dick's letter, written late Wednesday night, describing his second visit with John Calvin Yoakum. *Wednesday, September 15, 1977 (continued)*

(About that time the rains came.)

It took a little time for us to get settled back in John's car. He wears a brace on one leg and has been a partial cripple since birth.

Always a hard worker, he is called "the barn builder." John ran a little local telephone to the valley for years. He had the switchboard in his house and kept it up himself.

While still in the valley, John showed me a farm my grandfather had owned and had let his son-in-law, Oscar Thomas, live on. Oscar Thomas married Lizzie Mae Yoakum, youngest child of William G. and Martha Jane Burdine Yoakum.

John also showed me his farm, where his daughter now lives. The farm had belonged to his father, David M. Yoakum.

On my way back home from John Calvin Yoakum's, I stopped at Denny Marchio's home in Lone Mountain, Tennessee. Denny married my cousin, Louise, Horace and Bessie Yoakum's daughter.

Louise and her daughter, Nell Quesenbery, are also interested in the old families around Lone Mountain. We are kin to someone in all of them and so intertwined with others that it is hard to keep from being your "own grandpa." I'm kin to Louise and Nell from about three directions.

After I talked with Nell for some time, Mary Payne (Mrs. Tom) came in at Denny and Louise's. She is going to look up some information for me on my grandfather Burdine.

Then Nell and I decided to visit an authority on Lone Mountain history, Mr. Clay Evans, whose friends sometimes call him "Drybones." He is kin to nearly all of the neighborhood through the Jennings and Hodges. He married "A." Rosenbalm and that connected him with other interesting families. We had a very interesting visit. When we were ready to go, Clay gave me some good old time apples.

The end of my letter from Dick Yoakum.

Dick and I never managed to visit John Calvin Yoakum together. All that fall and winter, we were busy "root hunting," chasing first one family line, then another. However, before John Calvin's death July 29, 1979, I met two of his daughters, Opal (Toby) Turpin and Geraldine McNeely. The women were very lovely. They seemed happy to accept me as their distant Lone Mountain cousin. I was pleased to find them.

Toby told me about Greer Yoakum. He is a brother to John Calvin. Greer was born in 1879. This past April 31, he became 102 years old. Greer Yoakum lives in LaFollette, Tennessee. He married Lillian Van Bebbber.

John Calvin Yoakum's parents were David M. Yoakum and Rachel Moyers. Their children were Rose, Greer, Allie, Hettie, Herd and John Calvin Yoakum.

Marriages of David and Rachel Moyers Yoakum's children: Rosa Yoakum married T.H. Blansett (Claiborne County); Greer Yoakum married Lillian Van Bebber (Claiborne County). Greer is the only child in this family still living. He's 102 years old.; Allie Yoakum married Robert Wylie (Barnes County,?); Hettie Yoakum never married; Herd Yoakum married Bessie Cantrell (Claiborne County); and John Calvin Yoakum married Allie D. Houchin (Virginia).

The children of John Calvin Yoakum and Allie D. Houchin were: Ethel Ruth Yoakum Faramé, Edith Mae Yoakum Ousley; Nellie Yoakum; Thelma Yoakum (she married Clyde Yoakum); the twins, Kenneth Yoakum and Kelsie Yoakum Wilson; Opal "Toby" Yoakum Turpin; Bernice Yoakum De Garno; John Calvin Yoakum Jr.; Geraldine Yoakum McNeely; Rachel Yoakum and Charles David Yoakum. Out of these twelve, five still live. They are the twins, Kenneth and Kelsie, Opal ("Toby"), Bernice and Geraldine.

Opal "Toby" Turpin writes the following about her parents, John and Allie Yoakum: "Allie D. Houchin, born in Christenbery, Virginia, was the daughter of Rev. Charles D. Houchin and Margaret Price Houchin. She moved at an early age to Topeka, Kansas. Later, Rev. Houchin pastored Well's Springs Methodist Church on Back Valley Road, Powell's Valley, Tennessee.

"Allie was a schoolteacher at the Willow Springs, located in Powell's Valley, at the beginning of Yoakum Lane, where Carl Shipley's house is now located. This is where Dad met and married her.

"Dad, a carpenter, farmer, telephone exchange operator and merchant, (John Calvin also worked in Claiborne County School system). "John Calvin Yoakum, born May 28, 1885, died July 24, 1979. His wife, Allie D. Houchin, born July 31, 1888, died May 21, 1962."