

- **Claiborne County (TN) Progress**

## **Nell Quesenberg Report**

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### **PLANTING BY THE SIGNS**

**By Nell Quesenberg**

*“And God said, let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens, to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days, and years.”*                      --Genesis 1:14

The fine-spun white material belied the austerity of his robe that fell to his strong slender ankles. Bare, highly arched feet rested in intricately carved sandals.

Cooled evening breezes blew across the desert and into the purpled hills of outcropping stone. The skies were cloudless in this part of the Land of Ur.

Shyama's headdress was coiled into a turban, centered by a single bright jewel. Gently wind-waved, his long white head sheathe fell to his shoulders, covering black wavy hair.

Ardent black eyes were finely set in a dark aquiline face that would appear, sensuously alluring, until one looked deeper into that beautiful dark face and saw the deep lines of abstention.

This Eastern man of antiquity was a Chaldean. A seer who had come to this spot under the starry heavens, to study the celestial bodies of the constellation.

Do you believe in planting by the signs?

I called (Mrs. Ralph) Ethel Campbell, who was busily cutting out a small flowered dress pattern that perhaps she would wear Easter Sunday.

Ethel laughed, “Well, I remember one time Martha Evans (Clay Evans’ mother, my husband Jack’s mother), Cordie Slusher and myself were walking to visit Uncle Jim Lewis, who was sick. We began talking garden. Then Martha and Cordie began arguing over the signs. Martha believed in the signs; Cordie believed the signs to be nonsensical.”

The women turned to Ethel asking for her opinion. Trying to act as peacemaker, Ethel replied, “I’ve been told that the moon has power over the tides, so it might have something to do with crops.”

“She always has the prettiest garden and plants everything by the signs,” says Helen Jennings speaking of her niece Helen Painter. “Milton Painter puts his seeds in buckets of rich dirt. When all danger of frost is over, he takes his plants outside for a good early start.”

“But, Aunt Helen Jennings, do you believe in planting by the signs?”

“Yes, I believe in the signs. My mother planted her cucumbers on the first day of May. Have your hills ready and if it rains, stick the seed in anyway.”

Cleo Payne says, “I don’t know a lot about the signs, but I believe in them.” A fine cook, Cleo says this cake recipe that appeared in a Knoxville paper a while back is real good.

### **TEXAS TORNADO CAKE**

1-1/2 cups sugar

2 cups plain flour

2 scant teaspoons soda

Dash salt

2 eggs

2 cups fruit cocktail and juice

1/2 cup brown sugar, packed

1 cup chopped English walnuts

Sift together first four ingredients. Beat in eggs and fruit cocktail, pour in lightly greased, floured 9x13-inch pan.

Mix brown sugar and walnuts together; sprinkled over cake batter. Bake at 325 degrees for 40 minutes. Ice cake while still hot.

## ICING

3/4 cup sugar

1 stick margarine or butter

1/2 cup evaporated milk

1 cup flaked coconut

Combine in sauce pan first three ingredients. Boil two minutes: add coconut.

Spoon icing over cake, while cake is still hot. If desired, use double recipe of icing.

“Aunt Beular Wallen is strong on the signs,” claims Helen Collins. “I believe in them, too, but I don’t know them as well as Aunt Beular. I know that moon signs made a difference in the shortness or tallness of corn. It also makes a difference in other seeds, some will rot in the ground if they are planted on the wrong signs.”

“Oh,” said Otie Jennings Lane of her sister, Neva Williams, who lives with her: “Neva does most of our gardening. She goes strong by the signs.”

“Otie,” I said, “I called Donna Mae Bailey, and she was not home. Does she raise a garden?” (I should have included Donna Mae Bailey’s family in my list of families living on Ball Creek in my Christmas story, “Ball Creek Homecoming.” My mother, Louise Yoakum Marchio, used to go home from school with Donna Mae’s sisters, Frances and Billie, to spend the night in the old two-story Bailey house, near Ball Creek.)

“Donna Mae doesn’t garden now,” Otie informed me.

Ben and Jenny Phelps (Jack's sister), who live on lower Straight Creek Road, plant by the signs. Their neighbor, Dana Minton, just passed away. I thought Dana was an especially fine man. He and Lillian always had the neatest wood pile and one of the prettiest gardens I've ever seen.

Burton Minton was Dana Minton's brother. He and his wife, Dessie Minton, raise wonderful gardens, giving in abundance to their neighbors and friends. They are the most generous people, and Dessie is known throughout this county for her fine cooking style. The following recipe "is very good and very easy to make," says Dessie.

### **PORK CHOPS, ONION RICE BAKE**

6 pork chops

2 tablespoons lard-drippings

1 cup uncooked rice

1 envelope onion soup mix

1 can (4 oz.) sliced mushrooms

2 tablespoons diced pimento

Hot water

Brown pork chops in drippings of lard. Spread rice in bottom of rectangular baking dish (13-1/2x9x2 pan). Reserve one tablespoon of season from envelope of onion soup mix. Sprinkle remaining envelope of the season and bits on onion in the onion soup over the rice.

Add hot water to reserved mushroom liquid to total three cups of liquid. Pour these three cups of liquid over rice. Arrange browned pork chops on top of rice mixture and sprinkle reserved one tablespoon onion soup mix season over rice. Cover tightly with foil and bake in moderate oven, 350 degrees until tender, 45 minutes to one hour, depending on thickness of pork chops. Remove foil and continue baking for 10 minutes longer or until excess liquid evaporates. Makes 6 servings.

Always cheerful, seated forever in her wheelchair, Beula Milligan believes in signs for planting. Beula said, "My mother, Laura Hurst Maples, always planted by the signs."

Fred Wells' father, Tilmon Wells, and Jake Janeway would not plant corn on the first three days of May.

As usual, couldn't catch up with handsome Ed Shumate. Ed, with cheeks that are quite rosy, will be ninety-one in July.

Bonnie Brogan certainly believes in planting by the signs. Bonnie just recently got out of the Morristown, Tennessee, hospital.

Mrs. Ed Robinson (Mamie Duck) has a beautiful neat yard full of flowers. She also raises houseplants. She believes in the signs.

Couldn't catch Mary Payne at home. I would have liked knowing her belief, as she is a fine gardener.

Mrs. Tom (Gertrude) Harkleroad answered the phone at her mother, Ida Jennings, house. "Yes, they all believed in signs." Also, I tried to call Betty Manning, who has a fine recipe for lye soap, to see if she planted by the signs.

Cluster and Lillie Simmons believe in planting by signs. I wrote about Cluster and Lillie last summer in the story, "Cherish Until Death."

Martha Jane Mabe is the oldest person in Lone Mountain. Martha Jane Mabe turned ninety-seven March 14, 1982. She believes in the signs. Proudly, she showed me a large beautiful birthday card that the sheriff, Billy Wayne Smith, had sent to her.

Charlie Simpson may be the second oldest person in Lone Mountain. He will be ninety-three October 10, 1982. His present wife, Sarah, is his fourth wife.

From his marriage with Margaret Raby, he has Ruth (Mrs. Carl Brown); Lizzie (Mrs. Frank Mincey); Marie (Mrs. Herb Brown); Bootsie (Mrs. Frank Munsey); Hazel (Mrs. Clarence Nicely) and my girlhood playmate, Opal Lee, widow of Ralph Phelps.

Sarah, age seventy-one, is the daughter of Jim Lynch. She was first married to the late Elmer Trent. They had three sons, James, George and Charles Trent; two daughters, Bobbie (Mrs. Harold Mullins) and Ann (Mrs. Wayne Green).

Charlie and Sarah did not have children together. Both believe in the signs. Sarah said, “I can’t work a garden, but I raise beautiful flowers.”

Nature can be dry and barren; or moist and generous. People, also, can be barren or generous. Everyone I’ve written about is a warm, generous person.

Betty Manning, a special person to me, is deeply ingrained with the golden talent of friendship and generosity.

Irene Campbell Bargo is one of the most generous persons living. She and her husband, Barney, are always kind to the old and infirm.

I don’t know if they plant by the signs, but theirs is a beautiful garden. Irene is one of the finest cooks that can be found anyplace.

### **IRENE CAMPBELL BARGO’S JEWISH COFFEE CAKE**

Mix 2 teaspoons baking soda into one pint sour cream. Beat well and set aside. In another bowl:

1/2 lb. butter or margarine

2 cups sugar

4 eggs

1 tablespoon vanilla

Cream all of the above 4 ingredients and add:

4 cups sifted plain flour

1 teaspoon soda

1 teaspoon baking powder

Mix well; add sour cream and beat well.

### **TOPPING**

1/3 cup plain flour

1/3 cup brown sugar

1/2 cup chopped nuts

3 tablespoons butter or margarine

1/2 cup coconut

2 teaspoons cinnamon

1/2 teaspoon lemon juice

Mix topping well with your hands; set aside. (Irene says topping can be made a day ahead and set in the refrigerator, but you must make batter at the time of baking.)

Take 1/2 of your batter and pour into a well-greased, well-floured large tube cake pan. Add 1/2 of your topping; add rest of your batter. Then take the rest of your topping and sprinkle on top of the batter. Bake 60 minutes at 350 degrees.

I've eaten this cake, and it is delicious.

Well, I can't find anyone who doesn't believe in the signs. May all of you have a good garden.