

AS I REMEMBER IT

By Nora Jones Steele

Born December 25, 1880

d/o Wade & Rebecca Bartlett Jones – See Chapter 10.



One of my great, great-grandfathers was William Anderson, a merchant of Cumberland County, VA. Around ca. 1800 several of his children came to “Cumberland County: in Tennessee to live. Three of his children married Robinson’s. My great-grandfather, Thomas Shirley Anderson was one who came. His wife was Judith “Judy” Robinson, daughter of Edward Robinson and Anna Meadors Robinson. Some of Judy’s family came from Virginia about the time Thomas and Judy came. Thomas and Judy settled on Blackburn’s Fork in the area that was soon to become Jackson

County. Thomas and Judy reared seven sons and three daughters.

Their oldest daughter, Anna called Annie married Joshua Bartlett. Thomas gave three of his sons, Gallant, Thomas Jr., William Edward “Ned” and Joshua, his son-in-law, gold to come to Buffalo Valley to settle on land they bought from the government at thirty-five cents an acre. It was then a country of cane thickets and not too long before it had been a land of buffalo, deer and Indians.

Ned Anderson and Joshua Bartlett bought land where their farms joined in the lower end of the long valley. I believe Joshua built his first house about 1838 and lived there about thirty years, adding to it from time to time. This first house finally fell about 1945. The second house he built is still standing and was pictured in the Putnam County Herald, August 19, 1965 in an article on Buffalo Valley by Charles Denning.

Part of Ned Anderson’s house is still standing but is used for a barn. Thomas Jr. bought land a mile away, further down the valley. They were near enough to borrow fire from each other if they forgot to keep their fire burning.

Buffalo Valley was in Jackson County until Putnam was formed in 1854.

Thomas and Judy Anderson owned a number of slaves. They sent word to their daughter Annie Bartlett in Buffalo Valley to come over to Blackfork, where they lived in Jackson County, and they would give her a slave. Annie went horseback a distance of about thirty-five miles.

Soon after she arrived she selected Ailsy. Then she stayed and visited with her family perhaps a week or two. She noticed when Ailsy had four or five children and she was grieved to have to leave her little children. She could take only the baby with her. Grandma (Annie Bartlett) then refused to take Ailsy away from her little children. Poor Ailsy was later sold...she and her baby were taken down South and sold for \$1400, and separated from her children. Oh, the heartache the poor slaves suffered.

Grandma then selected Raney. Raney had only one little boy about seven or eight years old and she took him with her. He drowned when he was about fourteen and this grieved Aunt Raney. As was the custom, when Aunt Raney lived with Anderson she was Raney Anderson, but when she came to live with Joshua and Annie Bartlett she was Raney Bartlett. She later married a widower named Pleas League. He had four or five children. She must have been a good mother. They all loved her.

Mother told me about a young girl that no one wanted. She often came to Grandpa’s and Grandma’s and asked Grandpa to bid her in at the next sale. At the sale Joshua bid one dollar for her. No one else made a bid so Joshua owned her. She came to his home and stated a short while. Aunt Raney got so worried with her she left. Poor little black girl. No mother or father to love her.

Aunt Raney was loved by all the family. She held first place in our hearts. After slaves were freed she continued to live with my Bartlett grandparents. She lived to be near one hundred. She called Grandpa and Grandma, “Pap” and “Mammy”. I was nine month old when Grandpa Bartlett died in September 1881.

Grandma soon sold her farm to "Mit" Milton Bartlett, her son and my uncle. Grandma and Raney then came to live with my parents, Wade and Rebecca Jones. Grandma didn't stay at any one place very long. She stayed about with her children just wherever she was needed, helping in times of illness etc. Grandma was sixty-five years old when Grandpa died. Eleven years after Grandpa died Grandma was staying with her son Mit and his family. At this time Mit lived near the western end of the railroad bridge that crossed the Caney Fork River about a mile west of Buffalo Valley. The river was up, from early summer rains. Grandma got sick and died during the time the river was up and they couldn't cross the river to bury her where Grandpa was buried. He was buried on the old Ned Anderson farm. So Grandma's grave is on the Smith County side of the Caney Fork River. From Interstate Highway 40 you can sometimes see the tiny graveyard with an old bent iron fence around it.

Aunt Raney lived with my parents until she married and went to Lancaster to live. Lancaster was several miles west of Buffalo Valley, on the Tennessee Central Railroad. Aunt Raney raised her husband's children and when he died, she lived with her stepson who treated her well. She was near one hundred years old when she died.

I was too small to remember when Aunt Raney lived with us, but I knew her later. Mother told me when she had to spank me, Raney would pout. She didn't think I needed spanking.

In 1902, I married and went to St. Louis to live. I lived there thirty-two years. While Aunt Raney still lived I would write to her and send her presents. She couldn't write but her daughter-in-law would write for her. Her letters started like this, "My Darling Baby....."

For years the Tennessee Central had many passenger trains. There was a train a person could take in the morning and get to Nashville in time to shop several hours then go back home in the evening. These trains were called "Morning Shopper" and "Evening Shopper." When I would be in Buffalo Valley I often would go to Lancaster to visit Aunt Raney. I could go down on the morning shopper and back on the noon train. I once took my camera and made her picture. My daughter once made her picture also. Aunt Raney's husband was dead and she lived with her stepson. I asked her one time if he was good to her. She said, "Yes, he is good to me. If he see me in the yard pickin' up chips, he say, "Mammy, you git in the house. You've had yo' day."

One summer when I was in Buffalo Valley, visiting my family, my sisters and I were wishing we could see Aunt Raney. My oldest brother, Riley, heard us talking and came in the room and gave me money and told me to send it to Aunt Raney and tell her to come on the train to see us.

I met her at the depot. Her step granddaughter came with her. Aunt Raney had never ridden on a train. She told us she closed her eyes when the train crossed the river bridge.

We had a short walk to Mother's house. Mother was in the yard waiting, when we arrived. When Aunt Raney saw Mother for the first time in many years, she put her arms around her and wept, saying, "This is Mammy. I know it is Manny." Mother looked very much like her mother, Annie Bartlett. We sisters all had tears in our eyes. When Aunt Raney saw Mother it seemed to her she was seeing again her old beloved mistress whom she loved.

While she was there she told us stories of things that happened while she lived with my grandparents and also when she lived with my parents. When she lived with us my two oldest brothers, Riley and Henry were little boys. They liked to go to the Caney Fork River to swim, which was strictly against Mother's rules. Aunt Raney would tell them the creek (Indian Creek which was nearby) was big enough for them to go swimming. She feared they might drown in the deeper river. They always told Aunt Raney when they slipped off to go to the river to swim. She would try to get them not to go. She said she worried until they came home safe. She'd make them promise when they go to the bluff on their way home, they'd holler real loud so she'd know they "didn't git drownidid."

Once when they went to the river to swim, Henry put his shirt on wrong side out. Mother noticed it and asked if they had been to the river. They said, "No". Then Mother asked Henry why his shirt was wrong side out. He looked down at his shirt and said, "Well, I-uh-fell over the fence and it got turned that way."

I can remember how good my parents were to the colored folks. I loved them too. Here are a few named I remember. I can't remember all their names. If any readers remember others, or stories about them, please write me.

William Ben and Bob Bohanon; Alta Bohanon, her son Houston "Huse", her daughter, Myra Wester, Myra's children, Suse; Daut; Bill; Clifton "Clif"; Ike and Julie Ann Anderson. John Anderson and his daughter Parret Annderson. Aunt Ann and Uncle Rob Robinson; Mariah Bartlett; Lou Bartlett and her son, Jim Bartlett, and his wife Ocia.

Next issue I want to tell about Uncle Ike. I will send a snapshot of Aunt Raney to anyone sending 10 cents and a self-addressed envelope.

"Did You Come After Fire?"  
by Nora Jones Steele

Back in those old days when people did not have matches, each family had to be careful and not allow the fire to die out, even in the summer. Even in the summer it was necessary to keep a little fire in the fireplace and with a coal from this fire, they could start a fire in a stove or in another fireplace.

Sometimes however, they forgot or perhaps were too busy and let the fire die out. When this happened, one of the children had to go to a neighbor for a coal of fire to relight their own fire. Ned Anderson, my mother's uncle, lived about a mile from us and it was his house that we went sent "for fire", when our fire died out. We carried an iron kettle in which to bring home the coals to restart our fire. This interesting method of starting a fire was called, "borrowing fire."

To this day, if a neighbor comes in and says that he doesn't have time to 'sit a spell', he may find himself asked, "Did you come after fire?"