

MEMORIES OF THIS OLD STORE
By Charlie Hunter
1347 Gainesboro Grade Cookeville, TN 38501
The Upper Cumberland Researcher, Spring 2007
Volume XXXII, Number 1

On March 2, 1897 I had a talk with Charlie Pippin about the Old Country Store that was located on a three-cornered piece of land surrounded by roads about five mile West of Cookeville on the Old Gainesboro Road and about 150 yards East of Morgan Pippin Cemetery.

He said the first store that was there was owned and operated by Ben Hensley. This would seem to have been started in about 1915. Ben built a white weather-boarded dwelling house about three-hundred yards East of the store on the Old Gainesboro Grade where he lived. Ben was married to Sallie Whitson, the daughter of B. G. (Coon) Whitson. He had one son, Walter, who was born January 12, 1909. On May 17, 1917 Sallie died. Ben and Walter continued to live there and operated the store. Ben then married Alta Harley. Walter had been sleeping with his Dad and after he married he still thought he ought to sleep with him. Charlie said people would kid Ben about this.

In 1920 Ben sold the store to Burch Clinton and the house to his brother, Lee Hensley.

In 1921 Lee sold the house to Tom Pippin. Charlie said he moved Tom and Betty to this house. It might be of interest to know a little about them before we go on. Tom was big, husky man weighing about 200 pounds, and Betty was a little, hump shouldered person weighing about 100 pounds. She wore the wire-framed glasses about half way down on her nose looking over them most of the time. She was a sister to my grandpa Coon Whitson. She dipped her snuff with a black gum toothbrush, which she would roll around in the snuff can and then put it in her mouth.

She would sit there on the front porch, cross her legs and shake her feet while dipping the snuff and tell you a tall tale about something. She had a knack for getting names and things twisted around. Herber Clinton had two boys - one named James Harland and the other Royce Dean. She called them Jim Carlen and Rosco. The Progressive Farmer magazine she called the "Prosper and Farmer". The kitchen cabinet was a kitchen "tabernacle". Tom wasn't a lot better. He called macaroni "macaromans" and bananas were "panamies".

Tom had a horse and buggy and I understand he never learned to hitch the horses to the buggy. Betty had to do this for him. In 1925 he bought a new Model T Ford car. He finally learned enough to get it along. He said he could make the circle around the court house in Cookeville without any trouble. I remember being with him when he parked on Main Street. He was afraid to back it so he pushed it out in the street by hand and then got in and drove off. He held tight to the steering wheel with both hands while Betty would put a chew of tobacco in his mouth. In 1927 he sold the T Model and bought a new

Chevrolet Touring car. This was another hassle to drive, as it was different from the Model T Ford.

In 1923 Burch Clinton bought a new Model T. Ford car.

Boll Pippin also operated a country store about one mile South of Burch's store on the little creek that flows from the County Farm to Blackman's Fork Creek. They were good friends and supposedly Burch signed a note for Boll. When the bank notified them the note was due, Burch got mad and claimed he didn't sign it, called Boll on the phone and called him some bad names.

In a few days Burch's store burned. He accused Boll of burning it. Bob Lee Maddux brought the bloodhounds and they tracked the person to Boll's place.

Charlie Whitson was dating Burch's daughter, Nola, at the time, and he had gone to Boll's store for some smoking tobacco. After he got the tobacco, Boll, Charlie Whitson and Charlie Pippin, who was Boll's son, stood on the store porch and talked a while. Charlie Whitson went on home to his great uncle Kinch Whitson's where he lived since a small boy. This was possibly in sight of Boll's store. When Charlie got home he saw the smoke rising in the direction of Burch's store. He got on a horse and went over there and the store was burning.

Boll was going to have Charlie Whitson for a witness as he was standing on his store porch talking to Boll at the time the store caught on fire. They all appeared at the courthouse for the trial, but before it got started. Burch agreed to drop the charges. Burch built the store back immediately.

Charlie Whitson and Nola Clinton got married in 1925. I was only five years old but I remember being there for the wedding supper, which was before sun down. I wasn't accustomed to eating until after dark regardless of when that came. I had to have something else to eat before I went to bed that night.

Burch Clinton died on March 28, 1926 and Mrs. Sallie continued to operate the store. I remember my mother taking me there and buying me the first pair of long overalls I ever had. Mrs. Sallie took me behind the counter and held them up to me to see if they would fit. I was so proud of them I had to go to the field where Dad was working for him to see them.

Henry Julian had a blacksmith shop across the road from the store on Morgan Pippin's land. I believe it was about 1925 when Henry put up a building there beside the blacksmith shop and installed a gristmill. I believe it was a 12 horsepower single cylinder engine, which would have weighed about 2000 pounds with flywheels better than four feet in diameter. The stones were about 24 inches in diameter. A hammer crusher was used - rare for that day. People, accustomed to having corn ground on the water mills that tuned so slow, thought that one run so fast would just burn the corn up.

I think it was about 1930 when Charlie sold his farm and he and Nola had the white house at the back of the store on Shipley Road built. Along about that time Mrs. Sallie Clinton married Mr. Beverage Huddleston, and Charlie and Nola took over the store. Charlie had a Model A Ford Roadster that has been made into a truck he use for hauling. He also bought the gristmill from Henry Julian. In 1932 he bough a new Model B Ford Coach. Ford Motor Company only made that car for part of 1932. Then, the V-8 was put on the market.

In 1935 Charlie and Nola had a little family problem, and Charlie left and went to Crossville, Illinois and got a job. Nola sold the mill to George Harris. Then, my Dad, Alphus Hunter bought the store and leased the property. Henry Julian put another mill in that building and operated it for about a year. He then moved his mill out and my Dad bought one, which we operated along with the store until 1940. At that time John Poston John bought another mill. I believe the Postons stayed until 1942. Benton Slagle bought the property and used the store for a wood working shop for several years. Ben Chaffin operated the mill for a while. The picture was taken in 1972 and the mill house was torn down shortly after the picture was taken. The mill had a porch for storage for a while. Then some people lived in it for a while. It was torn down about 1984, and an office for the water utility district was built on the site. The white house at the back of the store still looks about the same as it did back in the 1930's.

In closing let me say, when Dad operated the store, it was about the middle of the depression years and there were about as many eggs and chickens brought and traded for groceries as there was money paid. We took the chickens and eggs to the produce house once a week. When we go into a supermarket today the produce is all the fresh vegetables. In those days, produce was dried hams, eggs, live chickens, cowhides, fur hides, ginseng, and walnuts.

<http://www.ajlambert.com>