

"MEMORIES OF 'PA SANDERS', BY HIS GRANDSON."

Wortham "Wirt" Soloman Sanders

b. May 21, 1872 – d. March 22, 1962

Wife: Caroline Elizabeth "Carrie Betty" Huddleston

Father: James Dawson Sanders (1843-1919)

Mother: Elritta Ogeal Wyatt (1836-1910)

W. S. Sanders General Merchandise was a landmark and bus stop on Highway 70 east of Nashville for more than 40 years. "Uncle Wert" kept a store in Buffalo Valley, Tennessee for many years before moving out on the highway three miles away where he owned about 50 acres of hillside. Because he was usually an easy touch for credit in his store to those in need and as co-signer for loans. W. S. Sanders lost everything when he had legal right because of loans he was party to.

Daughter Nelle Viola Beasley and husband, Jesse McDonald Beasley (who both had modest jobs during the depression years, unlike a majority of the middle Tennessee rural population of Smith and Putnam Counties paid the debts and purchased the Sanders farm and store, giving W. S. and Wife, Carrie a lifetime "estate" in the property. After their death the property was sold and proceeds divided (with Nelle's portion going to Jim Beasley).

"Pa Sanders" loved children and was as takes with Susan Jane Beasley (Jesse's daughter by second marriage) as if she had been his own blood relative. He taught Jim "Froggy Went a Courtin'" while Jim played in the store between the ages of 3 and 6.

In later years (in his eighties) he got the idea (surveying was so primitive on deeds and lines were related to things like "big oak tree top of the hill") that there was 6 acres of land not part of the plot acquired by Jesse and Nelle during the Depression and not part of a section which he had sold to his tenant farmer, Joe Crook. He made a handwritten deed to this land, using the original tree, rock and pacing boundaries and presented it to Jim S. Beasley. As part of the property settlement ten years after "Pa's" death, proceeds from this probably fictitious 6 acres were given to Jim Beasley (out of the sale of the total 40 plus acres on both sides of Highway 70) out of respect for his wishes, and broadmindedness.

Uncle Wert was so conservative politically that he "controlled" prices during and after WWII by selling important staples like flour and sugar at what he felt were reasonable prices, even when they were below his cost. Nelle Beasley encouraged his keeping the business open (and covered losses when necessary) because she felt that the daily routine was the best thing for his health. He lived less than two years after the death of Carrie Betty, with a neighborhood youth hired by Nelle to sleep in the house with him and look in. He was found at age 89 on the floor next to the pot bellied stove in his store dead of a stroke.

The only time he and Carrie Betty ever had cross words (wives were respectful of husbands in the extreme in those times and places) was over politics. Carrie Betty was a Roosevelt Democrat. Pa was a Wilke, Dewey (anybody...who professed opposition to the "New Deal" – government meddling in people's lives, paying people not to grow crops, price controls – involuntary, imposed – spending money you didn't have, ect.) Republican. They both may have been right, ironically. Carrie Betty with her intelligence, sensitivity and social concern, having been eldest in a large, poor farm family who scraped by on ingenuity. Pa, the essence of purity of motive and simplicity of thought (probably average intelligence, but a great interest in the world beyond anything he had ever experienced) with the kind of old fashioned values which, if held by everyone, would have made social engineering, government controls or regulation irrelevant.

As a child the writer (Jim Beasley) remembers local mental defectives coming into Pa's store with their welfare money attempting to spend it all on candy. Pa would lecture them, prepare a bag of groceries-whether the money covered the cost or not and then give them a sack of mixed candy as a reward for their patience during the lecture and selection of food. Carrie Betty, the Democrat, mumbled under her breath about "trash" taking advantage of Mr. Sanders. I suspect she was secretly quite proud of this well known character trait of W. S. Sanders.

The only time I ever saw him really angry (other than during political discussions) was when a bakery drummer (road sales person) sold him some loaves of bread which were returned by customers who found the bread moldy. When the drummer came back the next week for another sale, Pa met him at the door and threw the loaves at him. He did not stock baked goods of any kind for years after this incident.

While keeping store in Buffalo Valley he was taught some fundamentals of pharmacy by the local doctor (I believe the name was Dr. Denton). There was no pharmacist for miles and Sanders Store dispensed cold medicine, eye glasses, whatever could be kept and mixed and measured under the guidance of Dr. Denton. Pa would tell this story all his life and brag that he ran the first drug store in the area. The writer observed, after spending years in the city in the north, that a different personality – with this head start – might have taken that humble leverage and built a chain of drugstores across the south or the nation. How fortunate we are in this family that we had “Pa Sanders” instead.

*See History of Buffalo Valley & Rock Springs Cemetery at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>