

ANNA FRANCIS HAGGARD'S 'SUCCESS'  
THE SUCCESS OF THE OFTEN UNHERALDED

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The history of this country is accented with stories of courageous people who braved hardship and danger to triumph over tragedy, sorrow, and seemingly impossible circumstances.

For each story of courage and endurance chronicled in America's lore, thousands of others remain unrecorded and untold except the small number of people who witnessed them or passed them orally to successive generations.

ONE UNCHRONICLED story focuses on Ann Frances Haggard.

John Nelson Haggard returned to Buffalo Valley community of Putnam County after fighting for the Confederate Army and the Union Navy (yes, he fought on both sides) and married Mary Elizabeth Crowell. Except for nine children, John and Mary accumulated little, and five months after Parthena, the youngest child was born, Mary died.

One year later John Nelson loaded his six youngest children in a wagon and set out for an orphanage, but his bad luck persisted and the wagon broke down. He then parceled the youngsters among family and friends and left for Kentucky, never to return.

OBVIOUSLY, JOHN Nelson is not the hero of this story; but before we condemn him, let us recognize that his problem may have been beyond his ability to handle. There he was with eight of his children, from age five months to 18 years, and no wife. So how do you eke out an existence on a hillside farm and manage a brood so large?

Furthermore, the problem had been compounded when Anna Frances, the oldest girl at age 16, fell in love and married George Madison. It seems evident that John Nelson had not anticipated losing the family's female mainstay.

Newlyweds George Madison and Anna Frances made room in their little home for two of the six children, Daniel and Parthena. Anna Frances was pregnant with Virginia, who arrived in 1887. Mary arrived two years later and Cass about two years after Mary. Then came Etta, Joe, Ellen, Sam and finally Dallas, in 1904.

GEORGE AND Anna Frances believed in education, so one by one the older children attended Pleasant Hill Academy, a boarding school run by a group of missionaries near Mayland, Tennessee.

On Feb. 2, 1905, Virginia reported to her job in the academy kitchen and dropped dead. Sick with grippe (influenza) and stunned by grief, George arose from bed, walked three miles to the railroad station, rode a train to Mayland, and returned with Virginia's body. Anna Frances, with 7-month-old Dallas in her arms, later said she almost fainted when

her daughter's body was unloaded from the train, but she restrained her grief and kept her head clear.

George never recovered from the exposure to the February weather and from the grief of losing his beloved daughter. Fifteen months later he died, leaving Anna Frances with seven children, age two to 17.

NOW, ANNA Frances understood the problem her father faced a generation earlier because she was confronted with an almost identical situation. Unlike her father, she determined to keep her family together, and in some way to make a living on their hillside farm. Cass, 14, became man of the family, working the fields just as his father had. Etta watched the three younger children while Anna Frances went with the older children to the fields.

Anna Frances's heroic efforts made it work; she even managed to send the other children to Pleasant Hill despite her need of them at home. Her grit and courage became a legend, but known only to family and friends. She died in 1933 only 10 days after the death of her father, with whom she never totally reconciled.

For a dramatic conclusion to this story, it would be nice to say that the children of George Madison and Anna Frances became successful and famous, and that among them was a senator or a motion picture star or a major league pitcher. But such was not the case. They were farmers and teachers and housekeepers, modestly successful but never famous. Neither were they infamous, for they committed no crimes and did not cheat their neighbors.

THEY WERE and are ordinary people.

And so are George and Anna France's grandchildren.

I am one of them.

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