

A TRILOGY OF OLD HOUSE MEMORIES

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'Writers Corner'

I suppose it says something about me that the first three houses I lived in have now disappeared from the planet. Nothing good I suppose, for all three were built prior to the introduction of electricity and therefore were wired "after the fact" using those white light sockets made from porcelain and having wiring that ran along the baseboards and across the ceilings, many times in plain view. Of course there were never enough outlet plugs because what family could possibly need more than one per room. After all, how many things could they possibly come up with that would operate using electricity? Once you got past the radio and a radiant heater, what could be left?

Thinking that though a little more, I suppose that says I have lived a long time, which as they say, given the alternative, is a good thing after all.

The house in which I first saw the light of day on June 6, 194, was the "homeplace" of my great-grandfather, John Robert Chaffin, on Roaring River in Jackson County. It is located in sight of the river about seven miles east of Gainesboro. The original house which had been that of my great-great-grandfather, Abner Chaffin, had been a yellow-poplar log house with a dogtrot in the middle, as was the custom.

The "weaning house" (It was often used as the first residence of young married couples in the family) had been built a good ways from the river back up in the head of a hollow because the low-river country was thought to be filled with the fevers and unhealthy in 1858. By 1904, when John Robert constructed the house of my construction, that notion had passed and the river was the center of all things good. Steamboat packets from Nashville brought steel-beam turning plows and double-mantle fireplace enclosures complete with beveled mirrors like the one which graced our front parlor.

It was the site of grist mills which turned corn into meal and meal into sour mash whiskey, if you were so inclined. The old Abner Chaffin home place had stood there, unmolested for some 110 years until one night a couple of years ago, some folks with nothing better to do, thought it would be fun to set fire to the old structure and it went up in an impressive blaze taking the double mantle and its beveled glass mirror with it, leaving nothing but three chimneys to testify to its years of service.

The second house I lived in was what I often refer to as "the big house with the three gables and the wrought iron fence" which stood on the other side of Roaring River where it had been built about 1900 by my great grandfather Marlin F. Young. Grandpa Young was a farmer, a miller, and a maker of of legal whiskey, having obtained a permit from the state of Tennessee to make whiskey and pay the proper taxes on what he made. Not too long after he started making the whiskey however, my great grandmother Mary Smith Young became a member of the Church of Christ and soon after received a certain Devine revelation which made it plain to her that Grandpa Marlin should give up the whiskey making business. He gave it up in the interest of domestic tranquility. This house was my all time favorite and it stood vacant for many years, eventually being asked to bear the shame of having hay stored inside and pigs sleep under the floors. Finally, the owners took mercy and had the old structure smashed down with a bull dozer. It had a fine wrought iron fence, a piece of which now decorated my lawn; a sidewalk of solid hewn limestone, and a rock wall of huge hewn limestone rock. It also had a hewn limestone stylus used for mounting one's horse with grace. Particularly useful for ladies riding side saddle.

Finally, the little house of Upper Ferry Road is now nothing but a pile of rocks and brick, and I must say was scarce more when we lived there in 1948. From the yard of where the house stands, one can today see the Cumberland in the distance, with the Wal Mart Superstore in one direction and the Zinc Mine in the other. I climbed the fence with Randy Mayberry a year or so ago and we looked through the pile of memories that lay thickly woven in front of us. I showed him where the barn with milking stalls still stands, and where the front end of a WWII landing boat had been converted into a tank to catch the rainwater for

washing and watering the stock. Drinking water had to be carried a mile or so up the road from the spring that now feeds the pond on the Turner Farm.

I know time has too marched on and that progress is good for us, but I am grateful that time in its ceaseless March is not able to trample our memories.

Memories are not the black and white of the long ago and they are certainly not the High Definition and living color of today, rather they are sepia toned and tinted ever so slightly to meet our needs and expectations. They give us the ability to possess the convenience of the present combined with the pleasant, stress free, reminiscence of the past.

But as someone said on Facebook (the new source of all wisdom) “Don’t get so busy remembering yesterday, nor so anxious for the promise of tomorrow, that you forget to be there today.” After all, we have been blessed then called to be a blessing.

Read more of Robert “Bob” Rodgers Chaffin stories at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>