

WOOD FIRES AND ‘ASSEMBLING YOURSELF TOGETHER’

By Robert “Bob” Rogers Chaffin
Herald-Citizen, Cookeville, TN:
Sunday, 12 January 2014, pg. C2
‘Writer’s Corner’

One of the real pleasures of life in days gone by was just sitting and warming by a wood fire. My family had moved beyond the wood fire by the time my memory is clear, and had installed the new, more modern and efficient coal grate. That meant sealing up a portion of the old huge wood fireplace and inserting an iron “grate” which held the coal about nine or 10 inches above the floor of the fireplace. The ambiance of the wood fire was gone since coal looked different and certainly smelled different.



The smoke from a coal fire was laden with sulfur and one could taste it in the resulting blackish yellow smoke, which covered everything in the house. Even when we moved into town, the house was heated by coal – big chunk coal that was delivered once a year – or more in a really bad winter – and dumped into the basement coal bin. The last job on cold winter nights was for Daddy to go down to the basement and shovel a sufficient amount of coal into the monster of a furnace, then “bank” it with ashes from below so it would burn lower and slower and last though out the long winter night.

Of course, with the change to coal, the farm family moved one step further away from independence – coal was one more thing that required always scarce cash. Wood had been available in the tree stands around the farm and, in fact, was a by-product of the continual clearing of the land. On the other hand, as cash “public works” became more available in the Upper Cumberland, the family began to swap its labor off the farm for cash and had less time to spend in the woods, preparing for winter.

My mind had been on the old story about the preacher who was visiting a back-sliding brother. The old brother had been absenting himself from the assembly and the preacher was there to encourage him to congregate with others. It was called exhortin’ back then and no one made any apologies. As they talked the old backslider droned on about how he didn’t really need the company of other Christians and could find God in the woods (along with his squirrel rifle, no doubt) and that going to church really didn’t do him any good.

As they talked, the preacher picked up the tongs leaned against the big fireplace and pulled a burning chunk from the roaring wood fire.

The old fellow continued his monologue about the advantages of solitude.

Soon the burning piece began to cook, and having no synergy from the fire around, it dimmed and soon became a smoking ember on the hearth. The preacher picked it up and threw it back into the midst of the body of the fire and it roared to life again.

“Well,” he said, his point made by the fire, “we will still be looking for you next Sunday,” put on his hat and coat and made his exit.

Next Sunday the woods were minus one squirrel hunter.

Author of the books: *Pioneers, Preachers and Patriots: The Chaffins of Roaring River, Jackson Co., TN and Ridin' the Blinds.*

*Read more about Robert Rogers Chaffin in the Chaffin files and read more Writer's corner stories at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>