

## ALCORN FAMILY HISTORY

By Georgia Alcorn Bly, 1975

Robert Sidney Alcorn was born November 14, 1824, in Jackson County, Tennessee. In the year of 1842 Putnam County was formed from the west portion of Jackson County. Robert S. Alcorn always considered himself a native of Putnam County. He died June 28, 1902.

On January 28, 1858, Robert Sidney married Martha Exum McGinness, who was born January 9, 1831. She passed away December 23, 1900. This was her second marriage. She brought with her into the Alcorn family, a small son Felix, who was accepted and loved by all the Alcorns.

They settled on a large farm two miles from Buffalo Valley. They had been preceded by other settlers who had built homes along the Caney Fork River, where a store, and blacksmith shop marked the beginning of a settlement of happy, hard working people. They were determined to make a living from the soil, and the verdant pastures the hillsides afforded. The small river was to be used for transportation.

Martha and Robert had a large tract of land, about six hundred acres. They set about to build their home on a spot convenient to the large spring, which gushed from the base of one of the hills. This spring furnished water for the family. The spring house, built just below the spring, had a natural floor of large, flat rocks; this provided a cool spot for the milk and butter. The cold water from the spring flowed over the rocks which gave a natural means of refrigeration. This spring also furnished water for the livestock which was kept in a barn about a quarter of a mile away.

Robert and Martha selected a spot about one quarter mile from the spring for erecting the kitchen and big house. A barn was built across from the branch or creek, formed by water from the spring. As was the custom in those days, the kitchen was built several yards away from the main dwelling. This was planned to prevent destruction of the big house in case the kitchen caught fire. The kitchen was built first and the family lived in it until the big house was completed.

The big house was like most home built by pioneer farmers. They were comfortable, but not stately, as were the colonial mansions the more affluent in society could afford. It was entered by a small front porch, called a portico, which opened into a hall. There were two large rooms, one on each side of the hall, which led to a large back porch. At each end of the porch was a small bedroom. A stairway in the hall led up to the sleeping rooms for the older boys. It was also used for the farmhands who were hired during the busiest months to assist in working the farm.

Both of the large rooms on each side of the hall had large stone fireplaces, the only means of heating the house. Large logs were brought to the house and stacked in a convenient place for bringing in and placing in the fireplace. A fire was started the first frosty night in October, and was not allowed to die out until the family was sure spring had arrived.

One of the large rooms was called the family room. Here the heads of the house slept. The children also slept in this room. When the boys became old enough they moved upstairs with their brothers.

The other large room was called the parlor. It was furnished with a high walnut bed, a marble top dresser, washstand and table. This room was occupied by important people who came to visit the Alcorn family during their years of residence in this house. Other buildings of vital importance to the home unit were built beyond the kitchen leading to the vastly important spring house. First there was the smoke house, which was built of logs with a heavy wooden shingle roof.

Hog butchering time was important to these study farmers. Hogs butchered in November and December, properly salted and smoked with hickory wood, assured the farmers and sharecroppers of meat for the next year.

Beyond the smoke house was the chicken house, also built of logs grown in the area, with a heavy shingle roof. Nests for the hens and for the hatching of baby chicks were built along the side of the wall, being elevated to secure them from the marauding animals.

About halfway between the chicken house and the spring house was the blacksmith shop. This was the most fascinating spot on the farm to the grandchildren. We would stand by the hours watching the bellows blow the iron horseshoe to a real hot heat for bending and hammering into right shape or size for certain mules and horses.

This was the peaceful setting enjoyed by Robert and Martha Alcorn and her small son, Felix, in the year of 1858. We have been unable to obtain much information about them before they moved to Buffalo Valley.

An education was difficult to obtain in those days, as there were no public schools. Wealthy farmers would hire tutors to come and live in their homes and set up schools, usually on the third floor of their mansions. Farmers with less means would turn over a room in his house for a few months to some person in the community. The teacher was usually a self-educated person, who would teach the neighborhood boys and girls. They were called pay schools; they pay often being enough corn, ham or chickens to last the year. School books were few and expensive. One McGuffey reader sometimes was used by the entire family of several children.

My grandmother was one of those shy little housewives who referred everything to her husband. I never saw her reading, but she could write. She sat by the fireplace in the winter knitting or piecing quilts.

We never really knew where our grandfather received his education, but sometime before he met Martha, he learned to read, write and the rudiments of arithmetic. His mind was keen as to business and politics, so we know he had some advantages. He read whatever was available to him, his signature showed a firm, bold handwriting. His spelling was accurate.

Grandfather liked to use big words, and as I think back over the days I spent with him during my childhood, those words were used in the proper way, and greatly impressed his grandchildren.

Among the books which came down to his descendants were, of course, the family Bible, "Lives of the Presidents", with the last biography and photographs being that of James K. Polk, a copy of Pilgrim's Progress, and some very early readers.

Grandfather did not really do physical work on the farm. From my earliest childhood I remember him dressed in a wool suit, white shirt with separate cuffs and collars. My grandmother starched these with a starch called "celluloid" and his shirts looked just like that celluloid. He wore a watch chain across his white vest; in one of the pockets he carried a papier-mache snuff box from which he would occasionally take a pinch of snuff and sniff it. He greatly admired Andrew Jackson, and I think he posed a lot of his country gentlemen ideas and styles in imitation of him.

White he did not do any manual work, he knew how to get a full day's work out of his farmhands and his five sons. The big farm was made to pay.

He did not raise cotton, so he did not have slaves. The best money crop was corn. This was a two way venture; either feeding the hogs or selling the corn. If the corn was sold, it was hauled to the Caney Fork River, put on rafts and floated down the river to Nashville. Often livestock drovers would come to the farm, buy the livestock on foot and drive them to a riverboat or raft. This was prior to the establishment of the railroad.

The streams, however small, played a great part in the lives of these pioneers. My grandfather and my father marketed their timber in this way. The trees were felled by the farmhands. Then they used the mules and heavy log chains to lead the timber on log wagons and haul them to the river bank.

A raft was made by using huge chains to fasten logs together at the river's edge. The spring rains came, the rivers rise, then the rafts floated into the streams. There were always some farmhands who knew the science of getting the big rafts downstream. They built a small house or tent on the raft; this became their home. They lived on the raft the three or four days it took to get to Nashville. Lumber dealers bid high for the walnut and sturdy oak logs from the Upper Cumberland.

They lived their long lives and reared their families in this setting. Court records in the archives in Nashville show that my grandfather was in political and business affairs. He had for a time a general store in Buffalo Valley. He had numerous causes for going to Court, usually because he had signed notes for some of his friends or neighbors for loans from the Nashville Banks. It appears he often had to pay for his defaulting friends and neighbors.

One lawsuit on record was a case in which he was the plaintiff, bringing suit against one of his neighbors, V. W. Anderson. The defendant, Mr. Anderson, had been guilty of swearing three profane oaths at him. Apparently, the judge granted only a token damage, as my grandfather was awarded the sum of ninety-nine cents. There were other minor squabbles, mostly over boundaries, but they did not usually result in violence.

On April 22, 1861, a chubby little boy was born to Martha and Robert Alcorn. Fort Sumpter had been fired on ten days before. The southern states had seceded and set up a new nation, the Confederate States of America. Ware fever was sweeping the country.

Robert and Martha named their first born George Washington. Neighbors and friends came to see the new baby, and farmhands called him the new boss, who was later called "The General". The new name was shortened to General, and he came to be known as General Alcorn. This name remained with him throughout his lifetime.

In 1863 another son was born to Robert and Martha. He was named Albert Sydney, after the famous Confederate General Albert Sydney Johnston, who was winning victories for the South. Then in 1865 another son was born. Despite the fact that the tide of the war had turned and the brave Confederate General was fighting a losing cause, they named this son, Robert E. Lee.

The twins, Melissa, and Abel Van Buren, were born after the Civil War had come to an end.

Robert Alcorn did not join the Confederate Army, though he greatly admired some of the Confederate Generals, and his sympathy was naturally with the South.

In the beginning of the war between the state, it seemed far removed from the little farming area of Buffalo Valley. The first soldiers who rode away were young and hot-headed. They felt the South was being imposed upon, the planters had a right to own slaves. The very existence of the North depended upon the cotton produced by the South to keep the mills of England and the eastern United States running. Southern statesmen felt that England would come to the aid of the South with men and arms to force the North to bring a quick end to the war.

So with a family of small children and a large farm, which needed an overseer to produce big crops to help feed the Confederate Army, my grandfather reasoned that his services were not needed in the army as they were needed at home.

At first the names of Fort Sumpter, Bull Run, Antietam and Fredericksburg sounded so far away, the Confederates were winning all the battles. The settlers west of the mountains reasoned that the fighting could never reach the settlements, recently set up west of the Appalachians. They felt the Yankees would soon be brought to their knees, a new nation would be set-up, and life would go on in its old peaceful way, in the new Confederate States of America.

Then came the news of Gettysburg and other losses of the Rebel Army. Southern rivers were being made useless because of Union blockades. The fighting had moved across the mountains to Shiloh, Nashville, and Murfreesboro.

My grandfather wrestled with his conscience. Should he leave Martha and the small boys to join his neighbors in the army in grey? One day, a short time after, he rode to Silver Point to see his neighbors to find out what plans they had for protecting themselves from marauding armies. Knowing they would be foraging for food and livestock on their way to join Grant's Army in East Tennessee.

The marauders struck while he was away. A band of twenty men left the main army at Murfreesboro and traveled the main road through Buffalo Valley. They passed the Alcorn farm on their way to join Grant and Rosecrans at Chicamauga.

That part of the farm bordering the well traveled road was fenced and a rather imposing gate had to be opened before the farm proper could be seen. The Yankees could not pass by a place which showed promise of fresh horses and mules for travel, a smoke house and a chicken house full of savory food for hungry soldiers. They broke the lock on the gate and the twenty soldiers rode in and traveled the half mile to the big house.

My shy little grandmother was alone and frightened. The soldiers began by asking her where her husband was at that time. They wanted to know most of all if he was in the Rebel Army. She tremblingly told them he was not in the army, that she was expecting a new baby, and there was not one to care for her and the farm. The soldiers in charge ordered her to cook a dinner for them. Sick from fright, and fearful that her husband might return any minute, she managed to make two big pots of coffee, slice a whole ham into serving pieces, and make several pans of biscuits. One of the soldiers asked for milk and butter. She fearfully told them it was in the spring house and she was unable to carry the large pails of milk. One of the Yankees volunteered to get it, another joined him, they returned with all the milk and butter. The hungry, heartless men proceeded to eat everything she had prepared. One of the them found a pail of honey, so they feasted on that with biscuits for dessert.

Grandmother stood by the kitchen door while they hungry men consumed every bite she had prepared. She prayed unceasingly that my grandfather would not return until nightfall.

The food had been eaten when one of the ruffians grabbed up one of the coffee pots, still having some coffee in it, cursed my grandmother, saying, "This coffee is not good/" He then threw some of it on the skirt of her dress, and asked her for whom she was waiting. One of the other soldiers swore at the ruffian saying, "Jake Herron, why did you do that?"

After those soldiers finished eating, they proceeded to forage the place for whatever they could use. They went to the barn and took every horse and mule except for one old mule; he had only one eye.

They took all the meat from the smoke house, putting it in gunny sacks, fastening it across the mules and horses with ropes they found in the barn. The chickens were lured into the chicken house with corn; therefore it was easy for the soldiers to catch them, then the chicken's feet were tied together and thrown across the backs of the stolen horses and mules. They searched the kitchen and smoke house for all the sugar, salt and coffee they could find.

They so much wanted the honey from the bee hives that were lined up along the fence which flanked the creek running from the spring. Not one of the soldiers would offer to do battle with the bees to acquire the honey. Finally, two of the soldiers were standing near a hive. One, with malicious intent, kicked over the hive, then made a dash for his horse, which was hitched nearby to the fence. Spurring the horse unmercifully, he galloped away from the bees to the main road. The other hapless soldier, stunned for a minute, saw only one course. He vaulted the fence and jumped into the creek. His

uniform protected his body, and by keeping his head under water as long as possible, he escaped with only a few stings about the neck and ears. With a wet uniform he found his horse and made his way to the main road. His comrades were waiting with their ill-gotten booty to proceed on their ride to Chicamauga to meet the forces of Grant and Rosecrans.

My grandfather took the short cut through the woods to come home so he did not meet the soldiers. But what a home coming: His frail little wife was hysterical, the barn, smoke house and chicken house were stripped of their contents.

Fortunately, the cattle and hogs were feeding on the hills in inaccessible places and had not been found, so there would be food for another year. To make a crop with one old mule and the horse my grandfather had been riding gave a grim picture for the corn crop next year. However, grandfather reasoned that his neighbors and friends who were in battle were losing their all, his loss was small in comparison.

News from the battle front was heard breaking. General Lee was losing every battle. The stockade of the Mississippi had been successful and there was talk of cutting the Confederacy in two by a devastating march by the Union Army from Atlanta to the sea.

The Alcorn farm produced a small crop the next year, which he shared with his neighbors. Roving bands of freed slaves were pillaging the country and taking whatever they wanted. However, many of them wanted to find a place to work, get food for himself and his family, and Robert Alcorn seemed to know how to get along with them.

With the year 1865 came the surrender of Appomattox. Tennessee did not suffer as much during the reconstruction days as the cotton states. Farming was diversified. Some years the corn was better than others. There were always cattle and hogs to sell and logging to be done.

Robert and Martha had six children, whom they reared as best they could with such advantages as the pioneer area afforded. The boys worked in the fields, taking the opportunity to get a few weeks of pay school in winter.

Felix, the half brother, was five years older than General. He married early into a well-to-do family and established his own home.

In the late 1870's General and Sydney went to college at the small school established in the Cumberland Mountains by the Church of Christ at Spencer, Tennessee. They traveled by wagon. One of the farmhands drove the team which carried the students and their clothes, the furnishings for their small rooms, single beds, feather pillows, tables, and chairs. They had two years of what might be called a college education, which was more than most young men were able to get during those years.

The settlers around Buffalo Valley were neighborly and friendly, but there was very little social life. The farms were not close together so that no small communities existed, like in New England. Travel was difficult and made almost solely by horseback and over muddy roads. Few farmers could afford buggies and surries. These did not come into use until late in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Sometimes there would be an all day singing at some of the churches, and the church services were often made more attractive by "dinner on the ground", which meant everyone who wished to come could bring food, then after the church service, meet friends and partake of the bountiful feast.

Most of the young people met at these socials, for friendship which often developed into courtship and finally marriage.

At an early age, my father, General, and some of the other young men in the area formed a chapter of the Masonic Lodge. The meetings were held at Rock Springs Masonic meeting house, five miles from the farm. Rain or shine he would saddle his horse and ride to the meeting. Some of the friends who helped to establish this chapter of the Masonic Order remained his friends throughout life. He enjoyed the fellowship of the lodge and adhered to its teachers in his daily life. He encouraged his two sons, who were born to him and Josie after they reached the age of twenty-one, to become Masons, and to live up to the principles laid down by the lodge.

His older son, Felix, living in Arizona, joined the Masonic Lodge at Flagstaff, at the age of twenty-two. Twelve years later a group of young masons decided to establish a lodge in their home town of Williams. Their efforts were rewarded March 15, 1935, when Grand Canyon Lodge #35 was chartered. Felix was the third Master and remained a dedicated mason until his death at the age of seventy.

In the 1870's and 1880's the men who had sympathy with either the North or South forgot their differences. Robert maintained his sympathy with the South, and came out on the side of the Democratic Party. He ran for office as a senator in the Tennessee General Assembly, from the seven middle Tennessee counties in the year of 1889, and was elected. His neighbors, who sympathized with the North, voted for him. These counties comprised the Fourth Congressional District in Tennessee.

While in the senate, he worked vigorously for the building of better roads. This meant, in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, putting crushed rock and gravel on the roads to cover the mud holes. These roads led from the larger cities and were called pikes.

Grandfather also worked energetically for the completion of the Tennessee Central Railroad, destined to run from Nashville through an undeveloped area to Harriman, where it could connect with the Southern Railroad, running from the South to the North.

The railroad company surveyed the track to be built across some of the choice land of the Alcorn farm. They could use the land with the stipulation that the railroad company put in a side track for placing cars for the loading of corn and livestock. They also agreed to provide a flag or whistle stop called Alcorn Siding to take passengers on and off. My grandfather visualized this flag stop would one day develop into a railroad station with a town growing around it. This agreement was never put into writing. It was just a gentlemen's agreement, which lasted as long as Robert Alcorn lived. This flag stop was abandoned, the railroad company saying it lost money on the run. It took too much coal to get the steam up to make the Silver Point hill after the stop. A few years later the side track was taken up and the Alcorn Siding passed into history.

Grandfather served only one term as senator, as the trip to Nashville by stage coach was expensive. His sons also had married and moved into homes of their own; he was needed at home to oversee the growing of his corn crops.

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the Alcorn boys (except Van) had married and established homes of their own. The big farm became too much responsibility for my grandfather. Therefore, he rented parts of it and parceled the balance out to his children. My frail little grandmother could no longer cook the meals for the farmhands.

Robert tried to keep the old home running with the help of such tenants as he could find. He was restless and spent much time with his neighbors, or just riding to Buffalo Valley, Silver Point, or Cooksville.

Sydney, the second son in the Alcorn family, met and fell in love with a girl at Burritt College, a member of a leading White County family. He married her and always claimed White County as his home. Her name was Alice Burgess.

General left a pretty little neighborhood girl when he went to college. Her family did not have a large farm, but they were hard working and ambitious and always had what was termed plenty in those days.

The third son, Bob, did not attend college, but married a neighborhood girl whose father was well-to-do. Her name was Josie Jones. They had seven sons and my grandfather always expected they would own the farm and keep it in the Alcorn name.

The twins, Melissa and Van, were born after the Civil War. Melissa married young and died the first year after her marriage. Van never seemed to find his place in the world. He would work some years on a tract of land his father assigned to him; then drift for a year or two looking for something he wanted to do, then back to the farm.

General came home from college, back to the farm, built a small house on the tract his father had promised him, and prepared to marry his sweetheart, Josephine Garner. They were married January 11, 1883, at the Garner home with close friends and neighbors present. They proceeded on horse back to the Alcorn home, two miles away.

The next day a big "in-fair" dinner was served by my grandfather and grandmother. Friends and neighbors came in bringing all kinds of good food to eat. There was no dancing, but everyone laughed and talked, complimenting Josie's dress of blue cashmere. They wished Josie and General a long and happy married life. After the "in-fair" my parents walked the half mile beyond the Alcorn big house to the little three room cottage my father, General, had prepared for his bride.

Their first child, a daughter Bessie, was born in two years. Then in succession, two years apart, came four other little girls. When the fifth little girl was born, and my Aunt Vic came out of the room and said, "General, you have another pretty little girl:", he paced across the room several times and said, "how can I ever farm this land with just the help of five girls? I need a plow boy."



The next year, 1896, he saddled his horse one day and told my mother he was going to Cookeville and announce that he was a candidate for sheriff of Putnam County. It was a distance of twenty miles. He took two days for the trip, stopping at farms along the way to tell the farmers he was a candidate for the office of sheriff, stating that if he won the election he would do away with corruption which existed in the county offices at that time. That he would appoint only honest, sober men to the undersheriff jobs; he would give a clean administration and a fair deal to everyone.

He made a vigorous campaign on his black horse, Hawk; he forded swollen streams, went into the coal mining settlements where the children ran and hid at the sight of a stranger. He carried a few sticks of peppermint candy, which he offered them if they would come from their hiding places and tell him their names. He skillfully avoided riding into those shady, almost inaccessible mountain paths that led into the coves in the mountain sides, from which a cloud of blue smoke could be seen curling toward the skies on a clear day. These were the hide-aways of the moonshiners. Only the Revenue Officers would risk their lives by riding into such forbidding places. He would talk to different members of the different feuding mountain families, asking them for their votes and telling them he would show no partiality to either side if elected. He talked seriously to the older members of the feuding clans, telling them to try to settle their disputes by meeting and talking over their differences, thus avoiding their young men being shot in cold blood by a feuding neighbor from ambush while plowing his fields or out hunting rabbits or squirrels for meat for their family.

The "old guard" at the Cookeville Courthouse, who had held sway for so long, were at first amused that this awkward young 35-year-old upstart from the obscure lower end of the county would challenge their right to hold the county offices indefinitely.

General rode into the mountains, seeking voters, promising he would be fair in enforcing the laws. He promised the mothers, who did not have a vote at the time, if she would persuade the "men folks" of her family to vote for him, if elected, he would do away with drunkenness around the public square in Cookeville. So when her adolescent boy brought his pig or calf to town to sell them, he would not be approached by drunken men who would try to make friends with him by insisting that he take a drink of liquor with them. He promised to try to eliminate bootlegging in every fence corner.

To some of the women, he would say frankly, "I want to move my family of little girls to town where they can have the advantages of schools, music and Sunday School."

His honesty to people, his pleasing and friendly ways, won the confidence of the voters. When the votes were counted August 4, 1896, General Alcorn was elected Sheriff of Putnam County, upsetting a ring of corrupt politicians who had held a stranglehold on the voters for two decades.

Of course, my father's friends were overjoyed at his victory. There were no telephones or quick ways of sending the news into the small towns between Cookeville and Buffalo Valley. Some of his supporters conceived of an easy way to get the good word along the railroad route to his friends and family.

August 5<sup>th</sup>, a wagon loaded with long stalks of green corn was standing near the railroad track. While the mail and baggage were taken from one side of the baggage car, the elated voters, hastily used

strong cord and ropes to cover the opposite side of the car with stalks of corn. As the little train puffed its way through Double Springs, Baxter, and finally to Buffalo Valley, the residents would call out, "What's the meaning of the corn?" A sympathizer in the train crew would call back, "All Corn – everything is Alcorn, General has won the election." So the news was brought to my mother and a new way of life began for General and Josie and the five little girls.

The family possessions were few, but to move them by wagon to Cookeville, a distance of twenty miles, was a big undertaking.

Besides his own wagon and team, my father had to borrow two more from his father. The lead wagon was loaded with hams, bacon, lard, and what remained from last year's hog butchering. Next came whatever vegetables and fruits mother had been able to dry or preserve up to that time. Certain kitchen utensils, which were a must in every Southern family, large iron frying pans, called skilletts, large iron pots, essentials of cutlery, ironstone dishes, and a huge wash kettle. On top of this cargo was placed a chicken coop filled with live chickens. General did not have his bearings and did not know where food could be bought.

The second and third wagons carried the meager furnishings of the home. Three small walnut beds, the rocking chair in which my mother sat to rock her little girls to sleep, and a few straight chairs. The piece of furniture of greatest importance was the walnut pie safe my father made for mother before they were married. Of course, there were feather beds, pillows, quilts and coverlets, also hand woven blankets, which were the products of Grandma Garner's industrious labor.

The ever faithful farmhand, Ben Dinney, chose to drive the lead wagon. He got up at three o'clock, drank warmed-over coffee, ate cold biscuits, hitched his team to the loaded wagon, and drove off. He wanted to make most of the trip in the cool of the day, since he had a coop of live chickens. Mack Mitchell drove the second wagon, and father chose to drive the third. So General took his seat on the wagon for the long drive to Cookeville. I have always felt he wanted the last wagon so he could take it leisurely and concentrate on the great change that was taking place in his life and the lives of his family. Mother and the little girls spent the night at Grandpa Alcorn's home.

The next day, Uncle Van walked with mother and the little girls to Alcorn siding, which was the whistle stop on the Tennessee Central Railroad. We boarded the train, which was to carry us a distance of twenty miles to a world that seemed so fabulous we could not even dream of what it was like.

When mother and the little girls arrived in Cookeville, some of the furniture had been set in place, but the small walnut beds had not been set up. A salesman from a furniture store came to see the new sheriff and talked to him so convincingly about the new golden oak furniture that was the latest style; that to make his wife happy he should trade in the walnut beds and give his family what other proud housewives had in their homes. When the salesman offered to charge the furniture, that was too much to resist. When we walked into the house, there were the beds, golden oak. They had high headboards which almost reached the ceiling, and a dresser with a mirror, which to our unaccustomed childish eyes looked as large as the side of the room.

Our mother never took on an air of pride about anything, but as children we could recognize a twinkle in her eyes when she was happy and pleased. Now she was having what other fine ladies of the Gay Nineties were having – golden oak furniture.

The Office of Sheriff did not present many grave problems in the late 1900's. There were only dirt roads and no traffic problems. If a driver of a wagon or buggy was slowed down by a team ahead of him, he just slowed down too, until they reached their destination. Sometimes a wagon got stuck in a deep mud hole, but it was not one of the Sheriff's duties to help the driver out of his unfortunate situation. Other drivers traveling the same road helped the unlucky one out; then they filled the mud hole with rocks.

There were often quarrels among the neighbors over stock trespassing and boundary lines, disputes relating to the poorly surveyed farms. These could usually be settled in one session of Court. There were sometimes murders caused by the bitter feelings between feuding families. The prisoners were given every protection and it was usually proven that the murder was in self-defense. There had not been a hold-up since the Braswell Brothers were tried, convicted, and hanged for the hold-up and murder in 1878. There were occasional robberies of smoke houses, and chicken houses by discontented negroes, who felt the sting their ancestors had endured during their days in slavery. They felt the United States Government not only owed each one "forty acres and a mule", they also felt the government owed them a living for the rest of their lives.

As Sheriff, General tried to administer the law impartially. There was only one exception, he admitted in his later years; that was when a young boy would get into Cookeville on important occasions, such as circus days or the Cookeville Fair, he would get drunk and cause a disturbance which might be sufficient cause for arrest. General looked at the boy, called one of his deputies to come and get him, hide him out until his father could come for him. "I just could not arrest a kid like that – lock him up in jail for the night, and give him the stain of having been a real law breaker, with a record of crime that might send him on to the road of law breaking; this would be a cause for other arrests.

However, my father kept his promise to the voters. He went after the bootleggers who brazenly came out to the main roads and offered whiskey for sale to travelers. He lived up to his promise of putting an end to drunkenness around the public square in Cookeville. These offenders were promptly locked up for a specified time in jail.

When General grew old he spent much time sitting in the yard under the maple trees and talking with old friends who came by to chat with him.

One day a well dressed man came into the yard, came up to my father and said, "General Alcorn, you don't know me. I once lived in the mountains a few miles from here. I came to Cookeville one day without my parents and to prove to myself I was now a man I bought some whiskey. I got drunk, then picked a fight with a boy I had never seen before. I had my knife out, and will never know just how you were guided to that scene, but you stopped the fight and made me follow you. Instead of locking me up, you turned me over to one of your deputies and told him to hide me until you could get word to my father to come for me. I have been living in the North for a number of years and have held some responsible jobs. Each job I applied for I was handed a questionnaire. One of the first questions always

being, "Have you ever been arrested?" My mind always flashed back to you and I would proudly write in a big NO!"

The most sensational crime of the 1890's in Putnam County was the raping of a white woman on a farm near Baxter by a negro man. News of the crime spread quickly just by word of mouth all over the county. Sheriff Alcorn appointed extra deputies, the man hunt of the century was on. Word came to the Sheriff's Office that a man fitting the description of the suspect was seen catching a freight train out of Monterey. Officers placed themselves at points along the railroad leading east from Monterey. When the train neared Crab Orchard, the fugitive saw the officers, jumped from the train and started running toward the nearby wooded area. The officers called to him to stop, but he kept running, the officer had no choice but to fire his gun at him. He was wounded in the leg and taken to the nearest doctor where the wounded leg was put in a cast. Word came to the sheriff that they had his man. A fever for lynching this man was spreading like wild fire through the county. According to Sheriff Alcorn, "The prisoner must be given every protection."

He sent word to the deputies who had him in hiding, to put the prisoner in a wagon, cover him with straw and driving at night take him to the Cookeville jail. Instructions were given to the deputies to carefully protect the three negro prisoners who were in the number.

The leader of the mob rode into the jail yard, and said to my father, "General, we hate to do this but we must set an example so this crime will not happen again. Give me the keys so we can get this "nigger", lynch him and save out people from such crimes and lynching in the future."

My father said, "There are hundreds of you in this lynching mob, and only my four deputies and me to protect this man – here are the keys and even though he is a nigger, if one of you in the mob gang hit or kick him, I will arrest you on the spot and lock you up in another cell."

The prisoner was quickly seized, put into a wagon and taken to a spot about five miles from town, and hanged from a tree. No trial had been necessary, it was thought, since the prisoner confessed to the crime. There is no record of another case of rape of a white woman by a negro man in the past seventy-five years in Putnam County.

On Sunday, June 28, 1902 there was a big church dedication at the old Wolf Creek Church. There was to be dinner on the ground and the farm families for miles around were expected to be present. This was about eight miles from my grandfather's home. He purchased a buggy a few weeks before, decided to attend the meeting, hoping to meet old friends there. After the church service and dinner, a cloud burst the area of Wolf Creek, which had been a quiet little stream, was in a short time a raging torrent. The heavy downpour of rain about ten miles up the creek left no choice for the people, who gathered on the bank of the creek, but to wait until the heavy flow of water subsided before attempting to ford the stream. It caused no concern when they crossed earlier in the day.

Grandfather drove to the bank of the stream and appeared not to be fearful of the turbulent waters. The people on the bank yelled to him, "Don't attempt to cross that raging stream." He smiled, waved his hand and said, "Old Bill will carry me safely anywhere." He raised his buggy whip over old Bill and

urged him into the stream. When half way across the creek a big rush of water hit the buggy, turning it over. The buggy, Old Bill and my grandfather were carried down stream.

For three days they dredged the creek before finding his body. It was down stream three miles from where he made the attempt to ford the creek.

He was buried on the brow of a little hill beside Martha, overlooking one of his pieces of "bottom land". Thus ended tragically, a colorful and useful life.

General Alcorn served as sheriff of Putnam County eight years. He also served as marshall of the Tennessee Supreme Court for the years from 1911 to 1919. He was Chief of Police of Cookeville from 1925 to 1932, when he retired because of ill health.

Two sons were born to General and Josie after they had reached middle age. Felix, named after the beloved half-brother Felix McGuinness, was born in 1901. He went to Arizona as a very young man, and was married to Elizabeth Oswald in May 1926. They had one daughter, Elizabeth Josephine. In 1948, he and Elizabeth were divorced. He married Ruby Fair August 28, 1949 and passed away July 22, 1971.

Robert Henry named for both his grandparents was born in 1905. He married Beanie Tiller April 4, 1933. Five children were born to this union – Nancy, Charlotte, Robert Jr., John and Debbie.

General and Josie lived long enough to see Felix and Robert mature into manhood. Both were successful in their chosen career and were a source of pride to their parents.

The daughters of General and Josie Alcorn grew to young ladyhood and received their early education in Cookeville. They were teachers, both public school and music. Teaching first in rural schools and after they furthered their education by attending the University of Tennessee and other schools of higher learning, they secured positions in the city schools of Tennessee and other states.

Bessie, the oldest of the girls, was born November 12, 1885. She did not marry, but spent most of her life as a teacher of commercial subjects in the High School in Williams, Arizona, where she lived with Georgia. She passed away in July 1961.

Lela was born September 13, 1887, taught in the city schools of Cookeville before she married Charlie Gracey, a native of Cookeville, in 1915. They had three children, Josephine, Charline and Edward. Charlie Gracey passed away in May 1959. Lela gave much of her life to making our mother comfortable and contented in her last years.

Mamie, the accomplished musician of the family, was born August 31, 1889. She was recognized as a person of much talent and was a successful music teacher for many years in Cookeville and in Arizona where she met and married Roy Watson. They had one son, who became a successful physician in Southern California. Mamie passed away July 31, 1948.

Georgia went to Arizona in 1914 where she taught in the high school. She married Fletcher Bly, June 11, 1918.

The youngest daughter, Willie, was born October 3, 1895. She married Fred Luck of Watertown, Tennessee. They had two sons, Billy born in August 1922. He passed away November 15, 1939. George Fletcher was born in 1924. Fred Luck died February 2, 1970 followed by his wife, Willie, on December 17, 1972.

General Alcorn passed away June 22, 1935.

A newspaper reporter, while interviewing Putnam County's oldest voting citizen, who was celebrating his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday, asked him to comment of the political situation at the turn of the century. The centurion remarked, "General Alcorn was a fine man, a good citizen, and the best sheriff Putnam County ever had."

Josephine Garner Alcorn survived her husband nineteen years. She lived in the old home with Lela and her family and was contented and comfortable. Her greatest interest was in seeing the three young Graceys grow up. She was blessed with good health and a keen mind until a few months before her death. Mother made two visits to Arizona after she was 70 years old to visit her four children who lived in that state. This gentle little lady mentally alert also enjoyed reading the newspapers and magazines to keep informed on sports and politics. She passed away at the age of 91 on March 11, 1954.

\*This family history was written by Georgia Bly, daughter of "General" Alcorn, former sheriff of Putnam County. She was my great-aunt. I found some interesting things on your site about my family and thought you would like a copy. I typed it with no corrections for spelling or grammar. Mary Whitney, granddaughter of Felix Alcorn. Submitted by Mary Whitney.

\*Read more about the Alcorn family at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>