

AS I REMEMBER IT

By Nora Jones Steele

Born December 25, 1880

d/o Wade & Rebecca Bartlett Jones – See Chapter 10.

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One of my great, great-grandfathers was William Anderson, a merchant of Cumberland County, VA.



Around ca. 1800 several of his children came to “Cumberland Country: in Tennessee to live. Three of his children married Robinson’s. My great-grandfather, Thomas Shirley Anderson was one who came. His wife was Judith “Judy” Robinson, daughter of Edward Robinson and Anna Meadors Robinson. Some of Judy’s family came from Virginia about the time Thomas and Judy came. Thomas and Judy settled on Blackburn’s Fork in the area that was soon to become Jackson County. Thomas and Judy reared seven sons and three daughters.

Their oldest daughter, Anna called Annie married Joshua Bartlett. Thomas gave three of his sons, Gallant, Thomas Jr., William Edward “Ned” and Joshua, his son-in-law, gold to come to Buffalo Valley to settle on land they bought from the government at thirty-five cents an acre. It was then a country of cane thickets and not too long before it had been a land of buffalo, deer and Indians.

Ned Anderson and Joshua Bartlett bought land where their farms joined in the lower end of the long valley. I believe Joshua built his first house about 1838 and lived there about thirty years, adding to it from time to time. This first house finally fell about 1945. The second house he built is still standing and was pictured in the Putnam County Herald, August 19, 1965 in an article on Buffalo Valley by Charles Denning.

Part of Ned Anderson’s house is still standing but is used for a barn. Thomas Jr. bought land a mile away, further down the valley. They were near enough to borrow fire from each other if they forgot to keep their fire burning.

Buffalo Valley was in Jackson County until Putnam was formed in 1854.

Thomas and Judy Anderson owned a number of slaves. They sent word to their daughter Annie Bartlett in Buffalo Valley to come over to Blackfork, where they lived in Jackson County, and they would give her a slave. Annie went horseback a distance of about thirty-five miles.

Soon after she arrived she selected Ailsy. Then she stayed and visited with her family perhaps a week or two. She noticed when Ailsy had four or five children and she was grieved to have to leave her little children. She could take only the baby with her. Grandma (Annie Bartlett) then refused to take Ailsy away from her little children. Poor Ailsy was later sold...she and her baby were taken down South and sold for \$1400, and separated from her children. Oh, the heartache the poor slaves suffered.

“Raney”

Grandma then selected Raney. Raney had only one little boy about seven or eight years old and she took him with her. He drowned when he was about fourteen and this grieved Aunt Raney. As was the custom, when Aunt Raney lived with Anderson she was Raney Anderson, but when she came to live with Joshua and Annie Bartlett she was Raney Bartlett. She later married a widower named Pleas League. He had four or five children. She must have been a good mother. They all loved her.

Mother told me about a young girl that no one wanted. She often came to Grandpa’s and Grandma’s and asked Grandpa to bid her in at the next sale. At the sale Joshua bid one dollar for her. No one else made a bid so Joshua owned her. She came to his home and stated a short while. Aunt Raney got so worried with her she left. Poor little black girl. No mother or father to love her.

Aunt Raney was loved by all the family. She held first place in our hearts. After slaves were freed she continued to live with my Bartlett grandparents. She lived to be near one hundred. She called Grandpa and Grandma, "Pap" and "Mammy". I was nine month old when Grandpa Bartlett died in September 1881. Grandma soon sold her farm to "Mit" Milton Bartlett, her son and my uncle. Grandma and Raney then came to live with my parents, Wade and Rebecca Jones. Grandma didn't stay at any one place very long. She stayed about with her children just wherever she was needed, helping in times of illness etc.

Grandma was sixty-five years old when Grandpa died. Eleven years after Grandpa died Grandma was staying with her son Mit and his family. At this time Mit lived near the western end of the railroad bridge that crossed the Caney Fork River about a mile west of Buffalo Valley. The river was up, from early summer rains. Grandma got sick and died during the time the river was up and they couldn't cross the river to bury her where Grandpa was buried. He was buried on the old Ned Anderson farm. So Grandma's grave is on the Smith County side of the Caney Fork River. From Interstate Highway 40 you can sometimes see the tiny graveyard with an old bent iron fence around it.

Aunt Raney lived with my parents until she married and went to Lancaster to live. Lancaster was several miles west of Buffalo Valley, on the Tennessee Central Railroad. Aunt Raney raised her husband's children and when he died, she lived with her stepson who treated her well. She was near one hundred years old when she died.

I was too small to remember when Aunt Raney lived with us, but I knew her later. Mother told me when she had to spank me, Raney would pout. She didn't think I needed spanking.

In 1902, I married and went to St. Louis to live. I lived there thirty-two years. While Aunt Raney still lived I would write to her and send her presents. She couldn't write but her daughter-in-law would write for her. Her letters started like this, "My Darling Baby....."

For years the Tennessee Central had many passenger trains. There was a train a person could take in the morning and get to Nashville in time to shop several hours then go back home in the evening. These trains were called "Morning Shopper" and "Evening Shopper." When I would be in Buffalo Valley I often would go to Lancaster to visit Aunt Raney. I could go down on the morning shopper and back on the noon train. I once took my camera and made her picture. My daughter once made her picture also. Aunt Raney's husband was dead and she lived with her stepson. I asked her one time if he was good to her. She said, "Yes, he is good to me. If he see me in the yard pickin' up chips, he say, "Mammy, you git in the house. You've had yo' day."

One summer when I was in Buffalo Valley, visiting my family, my sisters and I were wishing we could see Aunt Raney. My oldest brother, Riley, heard us talking and came in the room and gave me money and told me to send it to Aunt Raney and tell her to come on the train to see us.

I met her at the depot. Her step granddaughter came with her. Aunt Raney had never ridden on a train. She told us she closed her eyes when the train crossed the river bridge.

We had a short walk to Mother's house. Mother was in the yard waiting, when we arrived. When Aunt Raney saw Mother for the first time in many years, she put her arms around her and wept, saying, "This is Mammy. I know it is Manny." Mother looked very much like her mother, Annie Bartlett. We sisters all had tears in our eyes. When Aunt Raney saw Mother it seemed to her she was seeing again her old beloved mistress whom she loved.

While she was there she told us stories of things that happened while she lived with my grandparents and also when she lived with my parents. When she lived with us my two oldest brothers, Riley and Henry were little boys. They liked to go to the Caney Fork River to swim, which was strictly against Mother's rules. Aunt Raney would tell them the creek (Indian Creek which was nearby) was big enough for them to go swimming. She feared they might drown in the deeper river. They always told Aunt Raney when they slipped off to go to the river to swim. She would try to get them not to go. She said she worried until they

came home safe. She'd make them promise when they go to the bluff on their way home, they'd holler real loud so she'd know they "didn't git drownid."

Once when they went to the river to swim, Henry put his shirt on wrong side out. Mother noticed it and asked if they had been to the river. They said, "No". Then Mother asked Henry why his shirt was wrong side out. He looked down at his shirt and said, "Well, I-uh-fell over the fence and it got turned that way."

I can remember how good my parents were to the colored folks. I loved them too. Here are a few named I remember. I can't remember all their names. If any readers remember others, or stories about them, please write me.

William Ben and Bob Bohanon; Alta Bohanon, her son Houston "Huse", her daughter, Myra Wester, Myra's children, Suse; Daut; Bill; Clifton "Clif"; Ike and Julie Ann Anderson. John Anderson and his daughter Parret Annderson. Aunt Ann and Uncle Rob Robinson; Mariah Bartlett; Lou Bartlett and her son, Jim Bartlett, and his wife Ocia.

Next issue I want to tell about Uncle Ike. I will send a snapshot of Aunt Raney to anyone sending 10 cents and a self-addressed envelope.

"Did You Come After Fire?"
by Nora Jones Steele

Back in those old days when people did not have matches, each family had to be careful and not allow the fire to die out, even in the summer. Even in the summer it was necessary to keep a little fire in the fireplace and with a coal from this fire, they could start a fire in a stove or in another fireplace.

Sometimes however, they forgot or perhaps were too busy and let the fire die out. When this happened, one of the children had to go to a neighbor for a coal of fire to relight their own fire. Ned Anderson, my mother's uncle, lived about a mile from us and it was his house that we went sent "for fire", when our fire died out. We carried an iron kettle in which to bring home the coals to restart our fire. This interesting method of starting a fire was called, "borrowing fire."

To this day, if a neighbor comes in and says that he doesn't have time to 'sit a spell', he may find himself asked, "Did you come after fire?"

"Uncle Ike"
by Nora Jones Steele

Stories of "Uncle Ike" still charm old and young. We children loved to hear the older ones who knew him well, tell stories about him. I've told them to my children and to my grandchildren and now my great-grandchildren about him and one of the children asked, "What is a slave?" How glad I am that slavery is gone from us.

The Anderson-Bartlett-Jones descendants of Buffalo Valley all knew stories about Uncle Ike. I've heard so many funny things about him and I can't remember but a few.

Ike was the body servant of Thomas Anderson, his "Massie" needed. He didn't work in the fields. This of course made the other slaves jealous.

When Thomas Anderson died (in 1858) seventeen slaves were to be sold. There was one slave the children did not want sold out of the family. They couldn't bear to think of Uncle Ike being sold and sent away. A few days before the slaves were to be auctioned off, the sons of Thomas asked Joshua Bartlett, their sister's husband, to bid on Ike and they would all help pay for him.

The day of the sale when Uncle Ike was put on the auction block traders began to examine him, feeling his bones for defects. Ike wanted to help make the price lighter so he pretended his ankle was in bad condition.

When prospective buyers touched his leg, he'd yell, "Ouch!" There was nothing wrong with him and in spite of his pretending he brought \$15,000. After the sale was over he boasted he could wallop anybody on the grounds.

Ike was now taken from Blackburn's Fork, near Gainesboro, over to Buffalo Valley to live with my grandparents. As with Aunt Raney he had been Ike Anderson but now became Ike Bartlett. Joshua, who opposed slavery now had two slaves in his home, both given to him. Mother was then twelve years old. As long as she and her brothers and sisters lived, they continued to talk about all the funny things Uncle Ike said and did.

I remember one story the Bartletts loved to tell was about a baptism. The Bartlett family were all Baptist all that were old enough to be baptized. Once, when a meeting was going on Becky (my mother, Rebecca) was baptized. Mealie (Permelia) was too young. Ike talked Mealie into the notion of being baptized. He would get around and say to Mealie, "Meal, you ought to be baptized. You just as well be baptized, as Beck. 'Fize' you make Mammy let me be baptized." That puffed Meal up. Ike then would go to grandma and say to her, "Mammy Meal go it in her head to be baptized. 'Fize' you know I wouldn't let her cause she's too little." Ike kept the argument going. Yeas later Ike would tell about and laugh bit about it. Ike and Raney called Grandpa and Grandma, Pap and Mammy.

I have one short memory about Uncle Ike. Once when he was on his way to my father's store he stopped as usual by the house to see Mother. He sat down but stood up and talked a few minutes. When he said he was going to the store I wanted to go with him. He put his hand down so I could take hold of his forefinger. I don't remember going to the store. All I remember is reaching up holding his finger ready to start. I don't remember getting to the store.

A while after Ike came to Buffalo Valley to live, he married Julia Ann. I remember dear Aunt Julie Ann real well. We all loved her dearly. Ike was several years older than Julie Ann. She lived quite a long while after Ike died. She was a very clean person and nice looking. She like to look nice and liked pretty clothes, such as they were. I never saw her with a dress on that wasn't spotless. She came to our house often after Ike died. I was an early teenager and dishwashing was my daily job. When Aunt Julie Ann came I had much help. I got out of washing dishes. She came to Mother's as often as she liked and remained as long as she liked. She knew she was always welcome.

Ike was witty. He used to say of Aunt Julie Ann, "All Julie Ann keers about is a new hat, a new pa'r shoes 'n' a trip and a 'flountin' with anotha niggah."

When Ike lived with my great-grandfather he helped treat a sick horse and years later he used to love to tell about that. He and one of the boys decided the sick horse needed whiskey. They went somewhere and bought the whiskey and took it to the pasture to give some to the horse but decided to hide it and drink it later. Next day, the horse came up 'nickern'. He pretended the horse found the whiskey.

Another of the Anderson slaves was John Anderson. He lived at Silver Point, six miles from our home. His daughter Parret worked for mother. She was a good girl. She and her parents were members of the Church of Christ.

]A number of years ago when I visited the old home place of my great-grandfather Anderson, I stopped at a house just across the road. There was an old man sitting on the porch. He told me one day while sitting there he saw an old colored man walking all around the old Anderson place. The old house was gone. He decided he would go talk to the old man. He said the man told him he was once a slave there. He pointed out the old stile and said, "Many are the times I led my massie's hoss there for him to get on." He said he lived in Silver Point and his name was John Anderson. He had gone because he had a desire to visit the old home place.

The old man told me when the slaves came down to the spring to do the washing they sounded like a lot of blackbirds. I have visited the spring and it was still a very large spring the last time I was there, in 1966.

*Read more about the people & places in Putnam Co., TN at:
<http://www.ajlambert.com>