

Life on the Farm
compiled from letters written by
Miriam (Shanks) Gwaltney - 2000

Walter Robinson & Euda Shanks were the parents of Walter Warren Shanks; Dorothy Ann Shanks; Robert A. Shanks & Reginald Shanks.

Their farm joined the Virgil Timothy Denny's farm. Walter R. Shanks ran a grocery store in Buffalo Valley with his brother Luke Alexander Shanks. Later the brothers started a store on the banks of Little Indian Creek. There was a blacksmith shop and a corn mill, with a scales for weighing wagon loads of corn. Neighbors took their corn (which they all grew) to the corn mill, and either swapped it to the miller for crushed or ground corn, or had the Miller grind the corn fresh for them. Luke sold out to Walter R. Shanks and started farming.

Luke was up at 4:00 a.m. and worked hard on the farm. He came in at noon for a big lunch, "dinner" they called it, then went back to work plowing with a mule, planting corn, or tobacco. The corn was used to feed the animals, horses, cattle, etc. as well as Luke's family. Luke Alexander Shanks married Dona Florence Boyd, daughter of George William & Tennie (Carr) or (Kerr) Boyd. Their children were: Ann Miriam Shanks, who married Bill Gwaltney; Naomi Carolyn Shanks, who married Ted Huddleston & George Morris Shanks, who married Brenda (Stewart) Haney.

Luke Alexander & Dona Florence (Boyd) Shanks' children were all born at home. Their third child, Naomi Carolyn Shanks was born in the Shanks' first home located in the 11th Civil District of Putnam Co., TN near Buffalo Valley. The house was built before the Civil War by John Young or his son Allen Young. The house was owned by several people, John & Allen Young, the Crowell family, the Maddux families, Betsy Ann Boyd Maxwell, Samuel Foster Maxwell and maybe several others. Audra Camilla (Anderson) Denny wife of Virgil Timothy Denny who lived next door to the Shanks was present at the birth of Naomi Carolyn Shanks and helped bathe the newborn. Dr. Samuel Denton was the doctor called to the house. * See *Story of a Country Doctor and Banker* by James L. Fletcher. The family of Wesley Carr who married Ina Belle Helms and lived on the Virgil Timothy Denny farm came over to watch the Shanks' other children, Ann Miriam & George Morris, during the birth. Ann Miriam and George Morris Shanks were born at the Luke Alexander Shanks' second home a little further up the road from the first house.

Later Luke had sheep and hogs on his farm. Luke's children milked the cows, kept enough for the family and sold the rest. The Shank family made their own butter & buttermilk in a churn. Another farm in the area that produced the same crops and raised hogs for market was the Virgil Timothy Denny farm.

The Shanks had a big vegetable garden. Dona Florence prepared and canned, kraut, green beans, beet pickles, cucumber pickles, peach pickles. She dried

apples for pies, hung up bunches of onions for winter use, dug the Irish potatoes & sweet potatoes and spread them out in a cool place in the barn crib to store. Dona canned pork sausages, stored bacon and ham in the smoke house. They also had smoked sausage in white homemade bags hanging in the smoke house. Luke buried turnips in the ground to keep during cold days. The children would pick blackberries and make jam & jelly. They would spread that homemade jam on their mother's hot cornbread. They would get their corn meal grind fresh from the mill and Dona would make the cornbread fresh from their grown corn.

Dona & Luke Shanks used to attend church at Maddux Chapel on the Sam Bartlett road, Putnam Co., TN, many years before their first born. Everyone from miles around attended that church.

Near the Virgil Timothy Denny farm was a church and a schoolhouse. The church was called Denny's Memorial Methodist Church, named after Timothy Denny, father of Virgil Timothy Denny who donated the land that the church and school were on. The school was called Denny's Seminary. Virgil Denny, Luke Shanks and Walter Shanks were the pillars of Denny's Memorial Methodist Church. Virgil Timothy Denny used to teach Sunday school class and people came from all over to listen to his lessons. Miriam (Shanks) Gwaltney daughter of Dona & Luke recalls the revival meetings in the summer starting at night at Denny's Memorial Church. People would gather from all around the area, many arriving in wagons pulled by mules. The Shanks family would hook up their buggy pulled by their horse named 'Snip'. The church would be filled with people many standing outside listening through the open windows to the sermon inside. Dona would bring small pillows and her children would stretch out on the front row when they got sleepy.

Dona Florence (Boyd) Shanks taught school at Denny's Seminary about 1921-1924, at different times before she married Luke Alexander Shanks. Miss Douglas Nichols was the teacher most every year. Mr. Gordon Lamb, Mrs. Mattie Bush were two other teachers, Miriam had. There were no discipline problems. The children took their lunch wrapped in the Nashville Banner newspaper. The lunch consisted of a boiled egg, country ham on a biscuit, sometimes a fried sweet potato jam on a biscuit. The Shanks children didn't have peanut butter so Miriam used to trade her lunch to a student named Harriet who sometimes brought peanut butter & crackers in her lunch. The children had two recess times when they would play games like 'Drop the Handkerchief', 'Hide & Seek' & 'Red Rover'. Other games were played in the schoolyard like marbles, jacks, and volley ball. On occasion the teacher would organize a spelling competition. The school later when no longer used burned down and when the church dissolved the building was torn down. There is a sawmill there now.

Miriam remembers when WWII started and military maneuvers were held all around Little Indian Creek, Putnam Co., TN on the Virgil Denny farm. The troops

were camped on Virgil's property near Denny's Memorial Methodist Church. The soldiers were preparing to go to Italy to fight the war. The terrain in the valley was similar to Italy so the soldiers could practice their maneuvers there. Dona would make chocolate pies for some of the soldiers. Miriam used to sit on her front porch and talk to them when they came to her house, she was in her teenage years at the time. Miriam and her sister, Carolyn would like to visit the neighborhood farms. They would go over to see Audra Camilla (Anderson) Denny. She was the wife of Virgil Timothy Denny. Audra would give the children a piece of homemade fudge or some homemade sweet. At Christmas time the offering would be a bright, shiny, red, apple, as some fruit was hard to get at the time. Miriam remembers visiting Audra's farm house full of country furniture and pictures. In the upstairs bedroom Audra had wallpapered the room with the many greeting cards she would receive from friends. Miriam would love to go out to the backyard and use the well pump to get a fresh drink of water.

A few people in the area had cars. Mr. Virgil Timothy Denny had a car that he parked in a garage by the road. Luke & Dona Shanks had a car, about 1935, that Dona drove until Miriam was born and then she parked it in the garage and drove no more. The roads were simple dirt roads that were not fully developed and travel by car could be difficult. When it rained the roads would turn to mud and have many pot holes. Autos capsized on rough roads, and the skittish horses were frightened by the noisy machines.

Miriam (Shanks) Gwaltney taught school grades 1-10 for almost 30 years, she has a B.S. degree in English. She has devoted many years to tracing her family tree and her husband's, Bill Gwaltney. She is very knowledgeable about the Putnam Co., area of Tennessee and other states that her ancestors came from. She has visited Warrenton, VA (Fauquier Co.) where the Shanks – Maddux families came from and Smithfield, VA (Isle of Wight & Surry Co.'s) where the Jared and Gwaltney's came from. She helps other people searching their family trees with valuable information from the library and local newspapers.

**See Luke Alexander Shanks Family Sheet*

Life was difficult, in the earlier days of the developing Putnam Co., TN. Lots of hard work was necessary to run a farm and everyone had their chores. Stores, mills, and businesses were not close and convenient. Cookeville was the big city. Life may seem difficult now even with our modern conveniences and transportation, but I'm sure it is a bit easier than in the latter days. Maybe people were happier and more thankful for what they had in those days. I'm sure families and friends were respected and held closer to heart than in our modern times. Education was acquired by attending school when the child could be spared from the duties of operating a farm. The school was poorly heated in the winter and it would get cold in the one room school house. The children would walk to school, some for miles. We should be thankful today for our modern

schools that everyone can attend daily. All a person had to do is go to a big supermarket and pick out their dinner, or eat at the numerous restaurants in their area. You don't have to work hard to find sometime to eat and the variety is endless. Social life and entertainment have improved, as far as accessibility is concerned, but I can't say the sincerity is still intact. The values and quality of country life was special. I am sure that modern life has its rewards but I think it lacks in personal satisfaction and country home charm.

When I went to visit in year 2000, Miriam and her sister Carolyn along with their husbands showed my husband and I several interesting areas. We trekked in the rain to see where Prettyman Jones and Angeline (Anderson) Jones were buried behind a barn covered with overgrown weeds. We visited several cemeteries in the area where my ancestors were buried. One interesting spot was where the old Hugh Wallace log home was and its cemetery. I visited the cemetery where my great grandfather Timothy and his wife Hettie (Paul) Denny are buried, along with Timothy's sister, Betsy Ann Denny and Capt. William Jared, son of John Jared the wagonmaker. My husband and I went to visit the Cumberland Gap National Park to see the natural gap that my ancestors used to get to Tennessee and other states where they ended up settling. We followed the crooked Roaring River to several cemeteries where my mother's ancestors the Loftis's are buried, descendant of Laban Loftis. We enjoyed seeing the old ruins of the country stores, mills, blacksmith shops, churches, post offices and homes that used to be in the area. It was especially nice to hear stories of how it used to look, sound and feel to those acquainted with the area.

I correspond to Miriam and her sister Carolyn (Shanks) Huddleston periodically for family information. The two sisters have been a big inspiration to me and of immeasurable help to trace my family tree. I have tried to compile the story above from letters written to me by Miriam (Shanks) Gwaltney describing her memories of her past growing up in Putnam Co., TN. I thank her for her valuable reflections.

Audrey June (Lambert) Denny – married to Michael Henry Lambert

**Miriam's sister Carolyn (Shanks) Huddleston remembers the WWII military maneuvers were held all around Little Indian Creek, Putnam Co., TN on the Virgil Denny farm. There was a very interesting occasion as I remember that the banks and creeks were full of soldiers, whether taking a bath or climbing the boulders with their jeeps and occasionally one would turn over and land in the creek--we sat on the front porch and watched the "live" action.*

June, I have some info that's not complete, such as: the Dillard family in Club Springs. Ernestine is 70 and md a Bennett--her sis came up from FL to visit her and knew alot of stories and had alot of picture, some tin--she was 80, her name, Jesse Noll--she md a soldier who was on maneuvers here in the 40's.

<http://www.ajlambert.com>



October 2000

L to R: Miriam (Shanks) Gwaltney & Audrey June (Denny) Lambert studying family documents at her sister, Carolyn (Shanks) Huddleston's house.



October 1992

L to R: Miriam (Shanks) Gwaltney; Robert & Doris Shanks at the spring of Cumberland Institute operated during the Civil War - in White Co., TN. This is where Prettyman Jones went to school. The school was run by Curtis McDowell. His daughter Amanda McDowell wrote a diary during the Civil War and it is transcribed in the book, Fiddles in the Cumberlands by Lela McDowell Blankenship



L to R: Audrey June (Denny) Lambert and Carolyn (Shanks) Huddleston discussing family information at her house in Silver Point, TN.