

Family History - Story Telling from my Grandfather James Overby

My maternal grandfather's family had a long tradition of oral history. My Grandfather's Father, David Overby, after the death of his first wife who died young in childbirth, married his second wife, my Great Grandmother Sallie Ann Skinner. Her mother was Elizabeth Edmonds, the daughter of Richard Edmonds. This line of my ancestry were the story tellers.

In the Lunenburg County VA area as well as much of the surrounding area there existed a culture of peoples derived from the intermarriage of early European immigrants with Native Americans. In the decades after the settlement of Jamestown, there were numerous young single European males who came to North America, while almost no single European females immigrated in the early years. This resulted in the marriage, many times, common law marriages, or some such arrangement, between these European males and Native American females. The resulting children, half native American and half European, resulted in a culture of peoples which were separate from the "aristocracy immigrants" who received gifts of land from the English King. The half natives were numerous and married exclusively with other half natives for several generations. Due to their paternity being the males from Europe, these people all had European surnames. In Southeastern Lunenburg, these surnames included, Turner, Daniel, and Thompson. These people were the surviving segment of the Native American culture, as many of the Native Americans sub-combed to European diseases for which they had no immunity. The children of the inter-marriages did have immunities from their paternal heritage. They, for the most part, adapted to live as European culture dictated, but continued many of the Native American culture traditions, ie. herbal medicine and a penchant for hunting and fishing.

As a child, I remember my grandfather continuing the tradition of storytelling. One of the stories which I heard many times as a child left a lasting impression due to the seeming disbelief of some of the mature members of the family. This was the story of the year that it frosted every month of the year, snowed in August, and there was almost no food produced due the cold summer temperatures. This is a story which was told to my grandfather by his Aunt Pru (Prudence Skinner). There was so little food produced during the growing season that the family experienced hunger as before unknown. The saving grace was the planting of turnips in mid-summer and the storing of the resulting root crop in kilns for use as winter food. The kilns were made by excavating a shallow depression in the garden area and lining the depression with pine needle straw, then placing the turnips on the straw and covering the mound of turnips with more straw and then a thick layer of soil. This provided protection from the winter cold and the dry cool condition inside the kiln preserved the root crop for winter food. During the following winter flour was extremely expensive due to the almost non-existent wheat harvest. The family survived by use of the turnips and hunting and fishing. This story which I first heard in the 1950s remained with me and was verified in the 1990s via an internet search. Via the internet I also learned that burying produce was a traditional Native American storage practice. Copied below is the account of the "Year without a Summer 1816".

My grandfather, who was born in 1894, also told of an unusual winter snow storm when he was very young. The snow was so deep that his father couldn't get out the door to the house, as the

snow had drifted higher than the door. This was when they lived on the east side of highway 138 across from "Brickland", before his father bought the land a mile south and on the west side of highway 138 where the family has lived for the past 100+ years. During the deep snow winter his father exited the house through a window and used boards to spread his weight to keep from sinking into the snow which was too deep to walk in. He walked with this board by board method to get to the stable to feed the team of horses and milk cow, etc. With the use of the internet in my later life I verified this story also. The article copied below describes the "Blizzard of 1899"

My grandfather relayed several stories told him by his Aunts Pru and Lucy. He told how Aunt Lucy described the "Aristocracy" of the community as folks who thought themselves to be above intermarrying with the part Native American population. In a time of limited travel this resulted in the "Aristocracy" marrying within a small circle of families to the point that their options for spouses became somewhat incestuous, or as Aunt Lucy phrased it, "they married each other until the babies heads got as big as beehives". She claimed that in one instance, a young lady of this area, a child of one of these incestuous unions was so ugly, large nose and ears, that none of the young men available would marry her, forcing her to marry a young man from the part Native American community.

My grandfather told of how his father came to purchase 200 acres originally part of a Kings Grant, being the same farm where my family has been for more than a century. His father, David Overby was from a family in the area of Dinwiddie County near Petersburg and the area of Blandford Church/Blandford Cemetery, where his father and paternal grandparents are buried. My grandfather relayed that he was told that the Overby family had been the recipients of a King's Grant in what is now Dinwiddie County. David Overby, born in 1851, was enlisted in the Confederate Army during the Civil War even though he was only 14 years old at the end of the war. When my grandfather asked his father about his service in the war, it is said that he stated that his duty was to stand guard at a bridge outside of Petersburg. This service was obviously with the "Home Guard".

David Overby was born in Wake County, NC. David's father William Epps Overby, had married in the Petersburg area of VA, then briefly moved to Wake County, NC where David and his brother James were born. After a few years the family returned to the Petersburg area of VA. My grandfather said that when he asked why they moved to NC his father David had said that his father William had moved there for a job working with his (William's) Uncle. The 1850 Wake County, NC census list William's occupation as painter.

After the Civil War, David Overby worked as an apprentice in a wheel wright mill in the Petersburg area. My grandfather, James, retold of that experience as his father had told him of the waterpower mill with large reduction gears and flat belts on pulleys to power the saws, lathes, and other tools. He told of how his father had later, after moving to Lunenburg, built a wagon from locally milled lumber, including how the iron tires were heated to expand, and then placed on the wooden spoke rims, then cooled with water to contract and tighten the tires onto the rim.

David Overby's first wife was Mary Moore was from a Lunenburg County family. How they met, I don't know, but suspect that this marriage is the reason David moved to Lunenburg. Census shows that Mary Moore and her mother were living in Lunenburg in 1860. By 1870 census David and Mary were married and living in Petersburg, also during the 1880 census. When this first wife died during childbirth, (mid 1880s) they were living in a house rented from the Manson family in Lunenburg. That house was just off the South side of what is now Fairview Road and on the east side of Stoney Creek. Mary Moore Overby and the child were buried in the yard at that home.

Sometime later, David remarried to my Great-Grand Mother, Sallie Ann Skinner and at the time of the birth of my Grandfather James, they were living in a rented house on the Neblett Plantation, on the East side of highway 138 across from Brickland.

At some point in the late 1800s the Neblett family, the recipient family of an original Kings Grant, was forced to sell 1000 acres of land to raise funds to "get a college student in their family out of trouble". This was a young man who had gone North to attend one of the Ivy League schools and had gotten into some kind of trouble. The 1000 acres was sold to a neighbor named Fletcher Manson for \$1 per acre. Mr. Manson in turn, divided and resold the land for \$2 an acre. David Overby bought 200 acres, the southern end of the 1000 acre tract for \$2 per acre. The Southern boundary of the 200 acres is the original Kings Grant property line. David Overby paid for the 200 acre property by installments, getting a receipt from Mr. Manson each time he made a payment, when he was to make the last payment he took the receipts to Mr. Manson expecting to gain a clear title to the property. Instead, Manson took the receipts under the pretense of doing a tally, but instead threw them in the fireplace burning them up. He stated that they were no good and David Overby should continue making payments. Soon after this, the Emporia Lumber Company approached David seeking to purchase the original growth pine timber on the 200 acres. David told the timber buyer he couldn't sell it because he didn't have title to it even though he had paid for it. The timber buyer said that if David would agree to sell him the timber he would get the title. David did sell the timber to the Emporia Lumber Co. and they deducted the \$400 from the timber sale and paid Manson for the land a second time. This is how David gained title to the land.

When my Great-Grandfather bought the 200 acres, most was woodland, there were several small fields in the center and Northern section of the property. There were two small houses on the property which were occupied by black tenant farmers, (former slaves who had been on the property throughout the re-construction period after the Civil War). The property also had been the site of a brick kiln, where slaves had made the bricks to build the house "Brickland" approximately a mile away. Brickland was used as the headquarters for the Northern Army "occupiers" immediately following the Civil War. Also on the property was a site where granite blocks had been quarried for construction of a wall around the cemetery at the original Neblett house which was across highway 138, east of the 200 acre tract. The quarry site was at a granite out-cropping along a small tributary of Kettlestick Creek. Kettlestick was the West boundary of the 200 acre tract. At the quarry site there was also a spring which was sometimes used for household water, called the "rock spring". The water came from a crack in the granite. The crack was probably created by the quarrying of the stone.

David Overby built a single story house on the 200 acre tract for his family home, he later added a second story to the front part of the house to create two additional bedrooms as the family grew. He lived in this house until his death in 1931. My grandfather, remembered that at around the age of 6 to 7 years old, his father put him on a horse with a bag of shelled corn also laid across the horse's back. He was sent to Neblett's Mill on Flat Rock Creek about a mile and a half from his home. When he got to the mill, the miller took him and the corn off the horse, ground the corn into meal and put him and bag of meal back on the horse and sent him home. My grandfather said that if he or the corn had fallen off the horse, he couldn't have gotten himself or the corn back on the horse. This was a different time, today such would probably be considered "child abuse". The common practice in those days was for the miller to toll the corn to pay for the grinding, in other words, a portion of the corn was kept by the miller to pay for the grinding. My grandfather said that he and his siblings would catch birds using grain as bait, placed under an overturned box which was propped up with a stick and a string tied to the stick. When the birds, robins, doves, cardinals, jays, etc., went under the box to get the grain, they would pull the string causing the stick to be moved and box would fall and trap the birds. They would then kill, pluck, and clean the birds; and their mother would boil them, remove the bones and bake the meat with potatoes in a pie with a covered crust. He said it was easier to catch them when there was snow on the ground.

The fields which were already cleared on the 200 acre tract at the time David Overby purchased it had been cleared of virgin growth pine by cutting the trees and rolling the logs into piles lengthwise of the fields. The fields were then farmed around the stumps, in the open spaces between the long piles of logs. At that time trees, mostly second growth hardwood had sprouted and grown among the piled logs in the rows across the fields. These windrows of piled heart-growth pine logs and the overgrowth of trees and shrubs among them, were occupying nearly half of the field acreage. According to my grandfather, he spent much of his youth working to clear these fields of the windrows and also clear new grounds. In the early 1900s most of the original growth pine in the surrounding area was sold to the "Emporia Lumber Company", they laid railroad track throughout the area with the main lines having some rather impressive grades of cut and fill which are still visible today. Laterals into the timberlands were referred to as "Dinky Lines", these track were more temporary, used to haul the logs out and then moved into new areas. One Dinky Line came across the 200 acre tract and lost rail spikes can still be found in the fields. Reportedly the lumber from this timber harvest was carried by rail to Norfolk and loaded onto ships bound for Europe. David Overby sold the timber on the 200 acre tract at that time reserving 2 acres to the West behind his home. My grandfather, James, was in his early teens and helped the survey crew cut sight lines as they surveyed the 200 acre tract prior to the timber sale. He related a story of this experience as follows, as the crew was establishing the southern boundary of the property, the adjoining landowner was with the crew also. This adjoining landowner was Robert Hite, he was the local magistrate (judge) and the postmaster as the post office was in his home. He prepared deeds for land transfer and notarized the signing of deeds, etc. He also held local court in the yard of his home to settle disputes, etc. As the survey crew was establishing this Southern boundary of the 200 acre tract, with this boundary being a King's Grant line of the Neblett grant, Mr. Hite was concerned as he could see that the straight line from Kettlestick Creek to Stoney Creek was going to pass further South than he had

anticipated and actually pass through an open crop field which he had been claiming as his own. My grandfather said that Mr. Hite kept saying "this line is going through my lot", as the survey crew got closer to his open field (lot) he grew more anxious and eventually called a hushed meeting with the surveyor. After this conference, the crew returned to the starting corner on Kettlestick Creek and actually moved the corner South about 300 feet and then surveyed a new course with a more Northerly trajectory crossing the original line about 1/5 of the way along the line from Kettlestick . This revised angle resulted in the line not passing through Mr. Hite's open field and the addition of approximately 10 acres to his property. So the King's Grant line (a straight line from Creek to Creek) is now no longer a straight line. To cover this abnormality, the Surveyor, who was Mr. Hite's Nephew, proceeded to show the compass directions and angles/distances on the survey plat as they would have been with a correct survey of the existing King's Grant line. He proceeded to continue the survey of the 200 acre tract using the newly established line (the ground marked line) and surveyed the 200 acres to be divided from the Manson tract. In essence the result is that Mr. Manson lost approximately 10 acres as Mr. Hite gained it. This intentional error was covered up as the plats were recorded with the County. There have been several confused surveyors since that time, but the erroneous ground line has prevailed.

The process my grandfather described for removing the windrows of logs in the old fields was a process of cutting the overgrowth and then burning the heart pine (virgin growth trees). He said they made a very hot fire, and that one of his favorite things to do was to find a hen's nest, get some eggs, and then wrap the eggs in wet brown paper from a sack and put it in the hot coals at the edge of the fire. He said that you could tell when the eggs were done cooking because they made a pop noise when done. This was a method of boiling an egg without a pot.

My grandfather related that his father, David was skilled a carpenter, cabinetmaker, as well as a wheelwright. He built coffins for many of his neighbors and his wife, Sallie, would sew the linings for the coffins. He also built furniture, several pieces are still here on the farm including a small secretary and a side table, both made from walnut grown on the farm and dressed by hand with a plane. One of David Overby's wooden planes is still here on the farm. My great-grandmother Sallie's spinning wheel is also here. The spinning wheel is likely much older and was inherited by her. There are cards for preparing the fibers and a pair of socks which were knitted from wool spun on the wheel. On the farm they grew cotton and sheep for the fiber to use in making thread and cloth. There was a weaving loom at the home, but it was not kept, as most of their furniture was not kept either. There is a walnut coat rack here that is from their home. Also here, is the family Bible which was from David Overby's parents, William and Elizabeth.

My grandfather went to school at Fairview, which was near the present day intersection of Fairview Road and Longview Road. He and his siblings of course had to walk to school which was about 3-4 miles. He said at that time there was a road from near Brickland, directly to Fairview, this road no longer exists and he also said that was before they started Kenbridge and there was no road where 138 now exists from Brickland to present day Kenbridge. He said the original town was near where Perseverance Church is now. When the Norfolk and Western Rail Road laid track through this area they put a depot on the rail line at what is now Kenbridge, so the "town", consisting of a few store building was moved to the present day site of Kenbridge.

I asked how many grades he went in school, he said they didn't have grades, he was on the third reader when he stopped going to school. He could read and write and was proficient at math. Later, he worked as a private building contractor and did cost estimates and used geometry for calculating roof angles etc.

He said that the years he went to school, it was usually just a few months in the winter, as he worked on the farm most of the year. One story he related about the time that the Emporia Lumber Company was working in the area, he was a young man of 11 to 12 years of age and decided that he could make some extra cash by planting a large patch of watermelons to sell to the timber cutting crewmen. He ordered seed from a mail order magazine and did his planting and cultivating, but the produce resulted to be not watermelons, but citrons. Citrons are a type of melon with seeds almost identical to watermelons, they are used for making citron preserves. He said that was one year they had an abundance of citrons, but he had no watermelons to sell.

During this same period, before the Norfolk and Western rail line and the establishment of Kenbridge, the nearest center of commerce was Blackstone which had a rail line from Petersburg. To purchase fertilizer for the farm fields David Overby would drive a team with wagon to Blackstone to get the fertilizer and other needs. My grandfather told of making the trip with his father. It was a one day trip going as the wagon was not loaded. They then stayed the night sleeping in the livery stable where they boarded the horses for the night. My grandfather remembered that there were many other travelers there also and during the night they were awakened by a commotion caused by what was reported to be crazy man running and screaming. My grandfather said that he didn't sleep much after that. The next day they loaded the wagon and started home. He remembered the main street of Blackstone being muddy with ruts as deep as the wagon wheels up to the axels. Since the wagon was loaded with as much as 600 pounds, it was a slow trip home, taking two days. They camped overnight on the South side of the Nottoway River. There was an area beside the road normally used for overnight camping and there were other folks there as well. He remembered the smell of the other campers frying potatoes, said it was probably because he was hungry, but they were best smelling potatoes he had ever smelled. They stayed the night and made it home the next day.

He also told of a trip his father, David Overby, made to visit relatives near Petersburg. He planned to walk to Alberta and board the train at that stop. Alberta is about 16 miles from the farm via today's roads. Having left the farm late in the afternoon and planning to catch the train in Alberta, he arrived in Alberta well before the scheduled train and decided to walk on the next station to save on the cost of the train fare. He made it to the next station well ahead of the train and continued to walk on to the next station and so forth through the night. He never boarded the train, but walked to Petersburg overnight, a trip of about 60 miles via today's roads.

My Grandfather also told many stories about his Mother's half- brother, Uncle Sid, Sidney Skinner, who is buried at Perseverance Church near Dundas. Uncle Sid never married and didn't have a home, he made extended visits to relatives and much of the time lived with his half-sister's family, my grandfather's mother. He was portrayed as eccentric to say the least. He spent most of his time hunting and fishing and did little to help with the farm or home. When he stayed with the family, during the winter he would sleep in the closet beside the fireplace. This

was a closet approximately 5 feet wide and 3 feet deep. Sid would sit beside the fireplace to keep warm but would not make the effort to add wood to the fire. He would just keep moving closer as the fire died down. He would not bring water from the spring, but if thirsty, would take the dipper from the water bucket and go to the spring and dip a drink of water and then come back to the house and return the dipper to the empty bucket. My grandfather remembered his Uncle Sid making pine tar by placing heart pine lightwood in a cast iron pot leaning sideways so that when he built a fire under the leaning pot the pine rosin (tar) would melt from the lightwood and drip to a pan from the leaning pot. When cooled the rosin would be a pasty goo which he used to dress his fishing lines (a cotton string) and to dress shoe laces to extend their life. His possessions would always include a ball of rosin and a ball of tin foil, and a wooden bottle with a screw top in which he kept his fish hooks and line. The children of the family would beg small pieces of the pine rosin from Uncle Sid and throw it into the fire to watch the resulting "blaze up" as the rosin burned, but Uncle Sid was very sparing with his gifts of rosin. At one point during a winter, Uncle Sid's rosin ball disappeared and he was certain that the children had stolen it to watch it burn. Everyone searched for it but it couldn't be found. Now you have to understand that Uncle Sid didn't bathe or shave in the Winter but waited for the warmth of Spring to bathe. One spring after he had been to the creek to take his Spring bath and shave, he was returning to the home and the children in the yard playing did not recognize him as he approached with his bath, shave and haircut. The children were afraid of the stranger coming near and ran into the house in fear. Well, at the time of Uncle Sid's spring bath after the Winter when the rosin ball was lost, he found the rosin ball stuck to his butt. It had obviously been lost through a hole in his pocket and spent the rest of the Winter stuck to him. The children were vindicated as they had not stolen it.

During the late summer tobacco harvest, Uncle Sid would do little to help with the work, but did assume the task of attending to the furnace fire of one single barn during the week long curing process. There would be several barns of tobacco harvested each week for a 5-6 period in August to September of each year. Sid would attend to one barn only and during the night, someone else would have to stay with the other barns to replenish the wood for the curing fire. He would devote his time to the one barn he was curing, day and night, he would not come to the house for meals or leave the barn for any reason. His meals were brought to him and he stayed at the barn. My grandfather told of Uncle Sid putting flour on honey bees as they sucked blooms to be able to better see the beeline and find the hive. Then in the winter he would know where to go to rob the hive and harvest honey.

Uncle Sid earned his spending money by cultivating Ginseng and hunting wild Ginseng which he sold. My grandfather remembered him going into the woods and selecting a site on a shaded North facing slope where he would use a hoe to grub an area of about a tenth of an acre and plant the seeds he had gathered. One year after the survey of the 200 acre tract and the selling of the virgin growth timber from the uplands, Uncle Sid gave his brother-in-law David Overby, who he was living with, enough barbed wire to fence the property along the survey lines and along the back of fields so that the cows could be allowed to graze the cutover woodland without straying off the property. He bought the wire with the proceeds from the sale of his

Ginseng. This wire can still be found in some areas along the property lines. My grandfather remembers having to go to "low grounds" along Kettlestick Creek and help to free the cows which had become stuck in the swampy mud after major rains. During the early settlement by the Europeans much of the low grounds along Kettlestick creek were drained and cropped. The soil was mounded into ridges with the rows running perpendicular to the creek. The mounded ridges were about 60 feet wide with the lower areas between the ridges being ditched. These were covered ditch drains. The bottom of the excavated ditches would have poles of trees placed in them, stacked so as to create voids beneath and between the poles allowing the water to drain along the voids to the creek. Then the poles were covered with soil and cropped over. The poles would last many years as they were sealed by the water not allowing oxygen to reach them. The lack of oxygen prevented decay. This is much the same principle as canning food for preservation. Many of the areas still show the ridges and row patterns and the poled ditches still deliver drainage to the creek. These fields were mostly abandoned with the advent of motorized farm equipment because the tendency to wetness caused the equipment to become stuck. In the era of horse and mule farming it was an excellent system as there was usually adequate moisture for the crops, even in dry years, and the low ground soils were fertile due to the deposit of sediments by stream flooding.

When Uncle Sid died, his half-sister my Great-Grandmother, said that she knew he had a \$20 gold piece but they could not find it among his possessions. The possessions were the rosin ball, ball of tin foil, and wooden bottle with fish hooks and line. She proceeded to peel away the layers of the ball of tin foil and found the gold piece in the center. The money was used to bury Uncle Sid and provide a grave marker. He is buried at Perseverance Church near Dundas. The wooden bottle with the screw top containing fish hooks is still at the farm now in my possession.

Perseverance was the church attended by David Overby and Family, until the establishment of Oakland Christian Church, a satellite church of Perseverance. These churches are in the Disciples of Christ denomination. When Oakland was being established David Overby was asked to be a charter member and agreed to do so. He helped build the church and built the wooden pew benches for the church. The family then continued to attend as members there. The original building was replaced in the 1970s. Stories my grandfather told about attending services there include the following. During one Sunday morning service, the pastor asked a member of the congregation to pray, he proceeded to pray, and continued for some time, reported to be about 20 minutes, finally, the pastor asked him to stop. Another story my grandfather relayed was the instance of two of the parishioners who experienced a long term disagreement. The anger progressed to the point that one Sunday as one had ridden his horse to church to attend services and tied the horse near the church, the other proceeded to shoot and kill the horse. He also told stories of the church dinners on the grounds and of the children playing and the teens courting during these events.

A favorite story my grandfather told was of Landon Taylor who was married to his sister Elizabeth. The railroad was put in through the county and on a Sunday afternoon an outing was arranged to go to the track and view the train going by. When nearing the rail track Mr. Taylor unhitched and tied the team of horses some distance from the track as he was concerned that the train would scare the horses. Then Mr. Taylor proceeded to pull the wagon with the ladies

riding up closer to the track to get a better view. The story was as the train approached Mr. Taylor became scared and ran away with the wagon in tow.

My grandfather related that he met my grandmother through a cousin, Luther Edmonds, who was dating my grandmother's sister Emma. As he made plans to marry my grandmother, Martha Buttner, his father, David, decided to give him 30 acres on the Southeast corner of the 200 acre tract, his plan was give each child a portion of his land with a few exceptions of providing cash for some of the girls who were already married and living elsewhere. My grandfather proceeded to build a home, with the help of his father on the portion that was to be his. He built a two room house and a stable. He married in 1916 and began to clear fields on the 30 acres he was to receive. His first crop of tobacco was planted between the stumps of the cleared new ground to the south of the home. It was an extremely wet summer with few opportunities for cultivation of the crop to kill the grass and weeds. The resulting crops in most of the surrounding area were very poor due to the grass competition resulting from the wet summer. My grandfather's crop, being planted in new ground, had few grasses and weeds, and he was able to remove most of the weed pest by going into the field barefoot and hand weeding. The result was that he had a more successful crop than most of the neighbors. The next year his brother, Richard was to marry and proceeded make plans to build a home on his promised 30 acres on the North end of the 200 acre tract. His wife-to-be would not agree to building the home until there was a legal separation of the property. In 1917 there were deeds executed for the two 30 acre divisions. In 1920 my grandfather's 30 acres was surveyed by the same surveyor who had previously surveyed the 200 acre tract. Since this 30 acres was adjacent to the moved line on the South, the intentional erroneously moved line was ground marked as the boundary with the drawn plat showing the true boundary to the South. The ground survey resulted in 30 acres being included in the ground markings and the ground marking boundaries continue to this day.

As my grandfather was clearing the site for his home, he cleared just enough trees to build the house and left the trees surrounding it to be cleared later. The house was placed on the Northern edge of the 30 acres and about 2 tenths of a mile off the road (present day Hwy 138). This location was selected to be near the spring (water supply) that was used by his father's house which was North across the spring branch on the next ridge. As my grandfather cleared his land for farming in the following years, he left a grove of oak trees on a higher ridge to the South, near the center of the 30 acre property. His plan was to build a larger permanent home in the oak grove and dig a well there for water.

As he cleared the area around the two room house for a yard, it was apparent that on the North to Northwest side of the house there were old graves, evident by the sunken 2 foot by 6 foot depressions in the soil laid out in a grid pattern. He knew that one of the houses which had been on the property when his father purchased it and was home to black tenants of the original property owners had been located a short distance to the Northwest on land still owned by his father. He assumed that the graves were those of slaves and former slaves, but was told by his Aunt Pru, Prudence Skinner, that she knew white persons were buried there and that she, many years earlier had attended a funeral there. She said that she had forgotten the exact location of

the graveyard, but remembered that it was near a “pecoke” tree. (I have found no reference to a tree of that name.)

The following years were a prosperous time for my grandfather he farmed the 30 acres, and worked as carpenter part-time, mostly in the winter months. In 1917, my mother was born, the first child. In 1922 my grandfather and his brother Richard each bought two pecan trees and planted one on each side of their homes, one of my grandfather’s trees died and the other three are still living, also in 1922 my mother at the age of 5 went with her mother to New York City via train to visit my grandmother’s relatives there. During this time my grandfather bought a Model T Ford, and a one cylinder engine for powering a wood saw and a stationary threshing machine. The Model T was designed with the gas tank in front of the windshield with the gas being gravity fed to the engine’s carburetor. My grandfather said that the hill coming North from the Meherrin River was so steep that the car would be on so much of a vertical angle that the gas in the tank was at a lower level than the engine and would not gravity flow. The only way to drive the car up the river hill was to put the transmission in reverse and back up the hill.

The road which was the east boundary of the 200 acre tract and sub sequentially the 30 acre tract was moved, resulting in my grandfather’s 30 acres being split with approximately an acre on the Southeast Corner being on the east side of the new road and other than my grandfather’s 30 acres, the remainder of the 200 acre tract not having any road frontage.

In 1923 my grandfather’s sister Sallie Josephine died and their father David bought a “square” of cemetery plots at the newly form Antioch Cemetery behind Antioch Church. Josie was the first member of the family buried there.

During this period my grandfather built another small house, one room with an attic and a shed room on the back for a kitchen. This house was to the South, near his two room home and was built for my grandmother’s mother, Bertha Buttner. He also dug a well, hand dug, lined with stone from the fields, 20 feet deep, at first with buckets and later a cast iron hand pump. All the while my grandfather was still intending to build his larger home on the high ridge within the grove of oaks he had reserved from the clearing of fields. In 1924 a second child Albert was born.

David Overby, my great-grandfather, built a house between his home and my grandfathers. It was also one room with an attic and a shed room on the back for a kitchen. This house was for my grandfather’s half-nephew, Horace (called Harris) the son of his half-brother William. As my great-grandfather was in his late 70’s Harris was newly married and farming on shares with his grandfather.

Each year after the sale of tobacco my grandfather would buy some of the materials he would need for the large home, nails, windows, rolled metal for the roof, he stored this in the loft of the stable year by year. Then in the Fall of ’29 came the great depression with economic disaster combined with the 1930 growing season being extreme drought in this area. My grandfather said it was so dry that summer, pine trees died from lack of moisture and both Kettlestick and Flat Rock Creeks ceased to flow. Many of the springs which supplied household water for the community also “went dry”, but the spring here continued to produce water.

The next year was also a dry growing season and crops were poor, making life hard. In 1931 my great-grandfather, David died and was buried at Antioch. His grandson, Harris continued to farm for his grandmother Sallie. As the farming operation was not prospering due the drought conditions and low crop prices of the depression era, they had to borrow money to buy fertilizer and seed to make crops in the next year. In 1934 my grandmother Sallie died and the federal government (Federal Land Bank) took ownership of the farm. This was the 160 acres between my grandfather's 30 acres and his brother's 30 acres. For several years no one farmed there, the land was idle and the home empty. Had Richard's wife not insisted on having a deed to their 30 acres, my grandfather would probably not have had a deed either, and all the land would have been lost.

During the years of the property being vacated, my grandfather and his brother Richard gathered apples from their father's orchard and made apple cider which was sold to a local "private and unlicensed distiller" who made and sold apple brandy. My grandfather also went onto the property and removed a large lock and key that his father had used on his smokehouse. My grandfather put the lock on his own smokehouse and it is still there. My grandmother reportedly admonished him for "stealing the lock" as the property belonged to the Federal Land Bank. The key to this lock is about 6 inches long. Photos at <http://www.edavidarthur.net/LockKeyDavidOverby.htm>

During this time of depression and drought my grandfather was not able to make enough on the farm to provide for his growing family. A third child, Robert, was born in 1933. They were in a two room house with 3 children. My mother slept in the house with her maternal grandmother, Bertha Buttner. Albert and Bobby slept in a bed in the kitchen, and my grandparents slept in the "other room". Years later as I was growing up, the second room of the original house was used a dinning room/den, but it was called the "other room". I grew up thinking it was normal for an 8 room house to have one called the "other room". I was grown before I realized how this came about and that it was unusual.

My grandfather related that during this time he had no money to buy the auto licenses or gas for his Model T and it parked, never to run again. He said that during this time he had needed new stove pipe for the home heating and cooking stoves and had sold enough eggs to get the 10 cents needed to purchase it. He walked to Kenbridge and bought it and walked back home. The family stopped attending Oakland church and instead went to Antioch, which was close enough to walk to church. My mother and her brothers attended Lochleven School which they also walked to, about a mile and a half each way. Later there was a bus, but as the roads were not paved, it was reported that the children spent more time pushing the bus than they did riding it. As a provision of the "New Deal" from FDR's government, the Works Progress Administration, WPA, provided jobs for local citizens, one "deal" that my grandfather participated in was the "soiling of roads" this involved the government buying gravely topsoil from farm fields and paying local people to move the topsoil onto the roads as a road improvement project. The locals made a wagon body for this purpose, it having a slatted bottom so that the soil could be loaded from the fields by shovel and then as the team of horses or mules pulled the wagon along the road, some of the alternating slats were removed so that the soil sifted out onto the road emptying the wagon. My grandfather sold an acre of soil, and to this day that portion of the

field is non-productive. Another "deal" he participate in, as did most folks, was the free grain that was given by the government to feed the teams of mules and horses so that the farmers would be able to work the animals and make new crops. My grandfather related that one of his brother-in-laws, the husband of his younger sister, Annie, got the grain, but instead of using it to feed his team, he used at least a portion of it to make liquor.

During these depression years, my grandfather was offered an opportunity by his brother-in-law, my grandmother's brother Arthur Buttner. Arthur was working in Richmond for the Tredegar Iron Works, a foundry. He help my grandfather to get employed there. He would go to Richmond on Sunday evening and return to the family and farm on Friday of each week. He bought a used Model A Ford to make the trips. Being the entrepreneur, he rigged a homemade crate on the back of the Ford to carry farm raised chickens and turkeys to Richmond with him. He was boarding with his brother-in-law, Arthur, and would kill and dress the birds in the yard of the home there as he was able to sell them to other workers at the foundry, a sideline business which also sold eggs. After a couple of years of this arrangement with the family tending the 30 acre farm and he working in Richmond, he decided that they should sell the farm and buy a home near Richmond to be together, but his wife, my grandmother, would not hear of it. She was absolutely against moving. He bought a battery radio and the home was connected to the world through it. In the later 1930's the economy was improving and the weather was more suitable for farming. My grandfather left the foundry and returned home for good. He abandoned the plan to build the large house on the ridge and instead used his supplies to build a 2 story addition on the front of the two room house. He cut timber from the farm and had the lumber sawed for the new addition. The family continued to work the farm and he found work, building for the new military base, Camp Pickett, near Blackstone. In the latter '30's he was making \$1 an hour. The REA ran electric lines through the county and there were lights and a few electric plugins added to house. While working at Pickett he bought a refrigerator and a new 110 volt radio.

The house next door, where Bertha Butter lived, burned down and she moved in with the family where she lived until her death in 1957. In the early 1940's my grandfather enclosed a portion of the back porch and made a bathroom, also adding indoor plumbing for the kitchen and an electric pump for the well.

ADENDUM

The Year Without a Summer

The year 1816 is legendary in the annals of weather. It has been called "the year without a summer", "poverty year," and "eighteen hundred froze to death."

From May through September, an unprecedented series of cold spells chilled the northeastern United States and adjoining Canadian provinces, causing a backward spring, a cold summer, and an early fall. There was heavy snow in June and frost even in July and August. All across the Northeast, farmers' crops were repeatedly killed by the cold, raising the specter of widespread famine.

The amazing weather of 1816 is well documented in the diaries and memoirs of those who endured it. Benjamin Harrison, a farmer in Bennington, Vermont, termed it "the most gloomy and extraordinary weather ever seen." Chauncey Jerome of Plymouth, Connecticut, writing in 1860, recalled "I well remember the 7th of June. . . dressed throughout with thick woolen clothes and an overcoat on. My hands got so cold that I was obliged to lay down my tools and put on a pair of mittens...On the 10th of June, my wife brought in some clothes that had been spread on the ground the night before, which were frozen stiff as in winter. On the 4th of July, I saw several men pitching quoits in the middle of the day with overcoats on and the sun shining bright at the time."

Since relatively few settlers had yet crossed the Mississippi, most of our weather observations for 1816 come from the eastern United States, particularly the Northeast, where there was a tradition of weather watching. The best observations available were made at Williamstown, in the northwestern corner of Massachusetts.

April and May 1816 were both cold months over the Northeast, with frost retarding spring planting. Flowers were late in blooming and many fruit trees did not blossom until the end of May - only to have their budding leaves and blossoms killed by a hard frost which also destroyed corn and some other plants

Warm weather finally came to all parts of the Northeast during the first few days of June. Farmers forgot the frost of May and began replanting their crops. But even as they labored, a cold front was approaching that would bring disaster.

Following the frontal passage, temperatures tumbled dramatically under the onslaught of Arctic air. At noon on June 5, the temperature at Williamstown was 83 degrees. By 7am on the 6th, it had dropped to 45 degrees - the highest temperature recorded for the day. All across central New England, early morning temperatures were the highest recorded for the day.

From June 6 to 9, severe frost occurred every night from Canada to Virginia. Ice was reported near Philadelphia and "every green herb was killed, and vegetables of every description very much injured." In northern Vermont, the ice was an inch thick on standing water while elsewhere in the state icicles were to be seen a foot long... corn and other vegetables were killed to the ground, and upon the high lands the leaves of the trees withered and fell off."

People shivered, dug out their winter clothing and built roaring fires. Farmers watched helplessly as their budding fields and gardens blackened and in northern towns newly shorn sheep, though sheltered, perished. Thousands of birds also froze to death, as did millions of the yellow cucumber bug.

The culmination of this remarkable cold wave came early on the 11th of June: At Williamstown the observer noted, "Heavy frost-vegetables killed at 5 o'clock temperature 30.5 degrees." Overall, frost killed almost all the corn in New England, the main food staple, as well as most garden vegetables.

There were two snowfalls. The first on the 6th, brought relatively light snow to the highlands of western and northern New York State and most of Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine. The second occurred during the night of June 7-8, following the passage of a second cold front. It brought moderate to heavy snow to northern New England, with lighter snow and snow flurries extending eastward to the coast and southward through northern Massachusetts and New York State's Catskill Mountains.

The following account appeared in the Danville, Vermont, North Star: Melancholy Weather . . . On the night of the 7th and morning of the 8th a kind of sleet or exceeding cold snow fell, attended by high wind, and measured in places where it drifted 18 to 20 inches in depth. Saturday morning (8th) the weather was more severe than it generally is in the winter. It was indeed a gloomy and tedious period.

In Canada. Montreal had snow squalls on both the 6th and 8th of June, while 12 inches of snow accumulated near Quebec city from the 6th to the 10th, with some drifts "reaching the axle tress of carriages."

This first summer cold spell was followed by 4 weeks of relatively good weather. Farmers again replanted, and crops were growing well when, at the end of the first week in July, a new cold outbreak came. Although not as severe as the one in June, it killed corn, beans, cucumbers, and squash in northern New England, and soon had local farmers talking about the threat of a general famine.

Once again, the remainder of the month was more seasonable, though there was another cool spell around the 18th. The hardier grains such as wheat and rye, however, came along well, and by August farmers were joking about their earlier "famine fever."

On August 20, another cold wave arrived, tumbling temperatures in New Hampshire some 30 degrees. During the next 2 days, frost was reported as far east as Portland, Maine, and as far south as East Windsor, Conn. Travelers between Albany, New York and Boston reported most of the corn in low-lying areas destroyed.

A more severe frost came at the end of August: In Keene, N:H., it put an end to the hopes of many corn growers, and whole fields had to be cut up for fodder.

The first week of September was relatively warm, but around the 11th and 12th a cold outbreak again visited the Northeast with hard frost reported in northern and central New England. It was the widespread and killing frost of September 27th however, which irrevocably closed out this dismal growing season and destroyed all hopes of even a small corn harvest in northern New England.

A Concord N.H, paper reported: Indian corn on which a large portion of the poor depend is cut off. It is believed that through New England scarcely a tenth part of the usual crop...will be gathered. In Montreal it was said that... many parishes in Quebec must inevitably be in a state of famine before winter sets in. During the severe winter of 1816-1817 which followed, the threat of starvation or semi-starvation became reality for many.

The first general migration from New England to the Midwest occurred the following year. Although there were other factors involved, it is interesting to note that the three northern States of Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine, which bore the brunt of the cold weather, suffered the greatest exodus.

In summary, the chief weather abnormalities of 1816 were the series of totally unexpected cold spells that occurred continuously through late spring, summer, and early fall and of course, the June snow.

New England temperatures averaged 3 to 6 below normal in June and July, and 2 to 3 degrees below in August. May also had been below normal as was the following September. It had been just as cold (or even colder) in each of these months in other years, but never consecutively. More significant however, is the fact that in 1816 the low temperatures occurred in a region where even a few degrees difference in the minimum temperature can mean a severe frost.

Although the New England farmer considered it a local tragedy, the abnormal weather was widespread throughout the Northern Hemisphere. In England it was almost as cold as in the United States, and 1816 was a famine year there, as it was in France and Germany.

Actually, 1816 was just one of a famous series of cold years. From 1812 it was cold over the whole world. In the United States, the depression of summer temperatures was the most remarkable on record.

According to William Humphreys, a Weather Bureau scientist writing almost a century later, the cold years were caused largely by volcanic dust in the earth's atmosphere: Such dust partially shields the Earth from the Sun's rays, but permits heat to escape from the Earth, thus lowering the temperature.

Three major volcanic eruptions took place between 1812 and 1817. Soufriere on St. Vincent Island erupted in 1812; Mayon in the Philippines in 1814; and Tarnbora on the island of Sumbawa in Indonesia in 1815. The worst was Tambora, a 13,000-foot volcano that belched flame and ash from April 7 to 12, 1815; and rained stone fragments on surrounding villages.

It has been estimated that Tambora's titanic explosion blew from 37 to 100 cubic miles of dust, ashes, and cinders into the atmosphere, generating a globe-girdling veil of volcanic dust.

The idea that volcanic dust suspended in the atmosphere might lower the Earth's temperature has been around for a long time. Like many other scientific firsts, it can be traced to Benjamin Franklin, although the thought may not have been original with him. In 1913, William Humphreys published a now classic paper documenting the correlation between historic volcanic eruptions and worldwide temperature depressions.

According to Humphreys, volcanic dust is some 30 times more effective in keeping the Sun's radiation out than in keeping the Earth's in. And once blown into the atmosphere—more specifically; the stratosphere it may take years for the dust to settle out (the finest particles from Krakatoa's eruption in 1883, for example, took 2 to 3 years to reach the ground.) During this period the average temperature of the whole world may drop a degree or two; while local losses can be considerably greater.

The chief effect however, as in 1816, seems to be the dramatic depression of minimum temperatures during the summer. A weak sunspot maximum also preceded the cold summer of 1816. During May and June, these blemishes on the face of the Sun grew large enough to be seen with the naked eye and people squinted at them through smoked glass.

In Humphrey's day, sunspots were thought to reduce the amount of solar radiation emitted and during a period of maximum occurrence, to depress the Earth's average temperature by as much as a half degree. As a result, sunspots also were blamed for the trials of the New England farmer in 1816. Humphreys showed, however, that whatever the historic correlation between the Earth's average temperature and the occurrence of sunspot maximums, the most pronounced dips in the world temperature curve were, without exception, associated with violent volcanic eruptions that exploded great quantities of dust into the stratosphere.

An example is the famous cold year of 1785, which followed the frightful eruptions of Mount Asama in Japan and Skaptar Jokull in Iceland. These produced a widely observed "dry fog" the phenomenon that led Benjamin Franklin to suspect a relationship between cold weather and volcanic eruptions.

Volcanic dust is believed to have played a role and perhaps a major one in the great climatic changes of past ages. Even relatively small variations in the Earth's annual mean temperature can cause widespread changes in Arctic ice packs and world sea levels, in desert boundaries, and in the geographic limits of plant, animal, and human life. According to Humphreys, volcanic dust blown into the stratosphere once a year or even once every 2 years, would continuously maintain temperatures low enough to cover the earth with a mantle of snow so extensive as to be self-perpetuating, and thereby initiate at least a cool period, or, under the most favorable conditions, even an ice age.

The New England farmer of 1816, of course, knew nothing of such theories, he knew only that something had gone wrong with the weather. And when that dreadful summer was followed by a winter so severe that the mercury froze in the thermometers, he must surely have thought the change was permanent.

Extracts from History of Madison County, New York... "Town of De Ruyter, Madison County, New York.

In 1816 came the "cold season". There was frost in every month. The crops were cut off and the meager harvest of grain was nowhere near sufficient for the needs of the people. The whole of the newly settled interior of New York was also suffering from the same cause. The inhabitants saw famine approaching. (The alarm and depression so wrought upon the community, that a religious revival ensued.) What little grain there was that could be purchased at all was held at remarkable prices and this scant supply soon failed. Jonathan Bently at one time paid two dollars for a bushel of corn, which when ground proved so poor that it was unfit for use: throwing

it to his swine, they refused the vile food. Every resource for sustenance was carefully husbanded; even forest berries and roots were preserved. The spring of 1817 developed the worst phases of want. In various sections of the county, families were brought to the very verge of starvation! One relates that he was obliged to dig up the potatoes he had planted, to furnish one meal a day to his famishing family. Another states that his family lived for months without bread, save what was obtained in small crusts for his sick mother, and the milk was their chief sustenance. When the planting season arrived there was no seed grain in De Ruyter, so the inhabitants combined and sent Jeremiah Gage to Onondaga County to canvass for wheat and corn. He was absent several days and the people, all alive to the importance of his mission, grew discouraged, fearing that there was none to be found. At length he was seen approaching along the road, his wagon loaded. a crowd quickly gathered; there was great rejoicing and tears stood in strong mens eyes. Each family repaired to Gage's house to receive their quota of grain and every household that day was glad.

Great Blizzard of 1899

The Great Blizzard of 1899 was a winter weather event unprecedented in American history. What made it historic was both the severity of winter weather and the extent of the U.S. it affected, especially in the South. The only event since that has been remotely similar was the 1993 "Storm of the Century", however that storm and its effects were less severe (though by no means less surprising) because it occurred at a warmer time of the year--mid-March instead of mid-February. The last time the South received any significant accumulation of snow was the 2004 Christmas Eve Snowstorm, but that storm mostly affected Texas.

Arctic cold

The event started out on February 11 as a severe cold wave in which every part of the East Coast from Georgia to Maine received sub-zero Fahrenheit temperatures. The following state record low temperatures for February were achieved:

Tallahassee, Florida: -2 °F (-19 °C) (the only sub-zero Fahrenheit reading in Florida to this day)

Diamond, Georgia: -12 °F (-24 °C)

Sandy Hook, Kentucky: -33 °F (-36 °C)

Minden, Louisiana: -16 °F (-27 °C)

Fort Logan, Montana: -61 °F (-51 °C)

Camp Clark, Nebraska: -47 °F (-44 °C)

Milligan, Ohio: -39 °F (-39 °C)

Lawrenceville, Pennsylvania: -39 °F (-39 °C)

Santuc, South Carolina: -11 °F (-24 °C)

Erasmus, Tennessee: -30 °F (-34 °C)

Austin, Texas: -1 °F (-18 °C)

San Antonio, Texas: 4 °F (-15°C)

Monterey, Virginia: -29 °F (-34 °C) (all time state low until 1985)

Dayton, West Virginia: -35 °F (-37 °C)

Washington, D.C.: -15 °F (-26 °C) (still the all time low temperature within the District of Columbia)

Winter weather

The port of New Orleans, Louisiana was completely iced over by February 13.

On February 14, the low temperature in Miami, Florida was 29 °F (-2 °C), the second coldest (and the first sub-freezing) temperature that the city has ever recorded.

On February 12, snow started falling from Fort Myers and Tampa in Florida west towards New Orleans. Blizzard conditions were reported north of Tampa along the west coast of Florida. The storm crossed the Florida peninsula and intensified as it rapidly moved up the Eastern United States. High Point, NC recorded 10-12" of snow, and temperatures as low as 10 degrees on the 11th, 5 degrees on the 13th, and 3 degrees on the 14th. It was said to be the coldest weather known to the oldest inhabitants. Washington, D.C. recorded its all-time record single snowfall of 20.5 inches (52 cm), though it was later broken. Cape May, New Jersey recorded 34 inches (86 cm), which is the highest single day snowfall total ever in New Jersey, in what is ironically normally the least snowy part of the state).

North of the Mid-Atlantic region, the storm weakened somewhat, but it was still a very powerful blizzard. New York City's Central Park recorded 16 inches (41 cm), which at the time was its 3rd biggest snowfall), but many surrounding areas recorded 2-3 feet (60 to 90 cm), as did most of New England.