

LIFE AROUND CENTERVILLE IN THE FIFTIES AND SIXTIES

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BY DAN AND NANCY CURRY

Life around Centerville in the fifties and sixties was quite different than today. One couple comes to mind John Allen Campbell and his wife of fifty plus years Ella. We country folk pronounced her name as Eler, affectionately called by many as Ms. Eler. Ms. Ella's maiden name was Ford. Her 90 acre family farm became Lenora Park on Lenora Church Road.

John was a farmer, a deacon at Rock Bridge Baptist Church, manager of the election polls of the Rock Bridge Militia district and Justice of the Peace. John and Ella's 100 acre farm was at the end of Mason Drive (now Laurel Falls Drive) off highway 124. John raised corn and cotton, and had a chicken house where he raised fryer chickens commercially. John tended the crops with a horse named Maud. They had cows and Ms. Ella ran a "cottage industry" so defined by her Granddaughter Nancy. I may have failed to tell you I married Nancy. John and Ms. Ella milked the cows. She churned the milk and produced butter. She sold the milk and butter. A gentleman from Atlanta came to buy her milk and butter.

John and Ella both came from large families. They produced a sizable family themselves. Their oldest son Clark was killed in an automobile crash on Annistown Road while home on leave from the army. A second son died as an infant soon after birth. Sons Fred and Johnny served in the army throughout Italy and North Africa. Their oldest daughter Jewel was the only child that attended college. Their second daughter and youngest child Susie married David Mason. David and Susie farmed, ran a fruit stand and operated a restaurant for a number of years.

The local school was Centerville with grades 1 through 10. Snellville had an eleventh grade. Back then in this area there was no twelfth grade. Daughter Jewel in order to have a good education elected to attend Snellville High School for the eleventh grade. Now bear in mind Snellville is 5 miles north of Centerville. So Jewel and two girlfriends enrolled in Snellville High for the eleventh grade. They boarded with Mr. and Mr. E R Snell. Upon graduation from Snellville High Jewel enrolled in North Georgia College in Dahlonega. There she met the love of her life Harold West, the son of Dr. and Mrs. West of Dahlonega. Jewel and Harold ran a very successful laundry in Dahlonega while raising four boys. Less than a year after the marriage of his daughter, John walked into a local store and told his friends "this is the happiest day of life". Daughter Jewel and husband were home for the weekend and son Corporal Clark Campbell was home from the army on leave. Later that day joy turned to tragedy Clark was killed in an automobile crash.

Johnny married Mary Mason. She had two sons when they married and they had two daughters.

Fred married Ophelia Boozer. They had two daughters.

John and Ella shared a strong work ethic which was handed down to their children and grandchildren. During WWII John work at Bell Bomber (now known as Lockheed Martin Aircraft) He worked at the local cotton gin in Centerville. Ella gathered with ladies of the community to "quilt quilts" to be used in their homes or sometimes raffled to raise money for a community project or to help a friend in need.

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There was a large screened porch on the front of John and Ella's farm house overlooking a corn field. During the warm months of the year the Campbell's along with family, friends, milk and butter customers and others would gather to discuss crops, politics and religion. John being a justice of the peace he just might have a couple drop by to get married on that porch or in the front room of the farm house. John was not educated but wise for that day and time. People would stop by to ask for advice, have a will written, swear out a warrant, or draw up papers to have someone's wages garnished.

I recall being on that porch one evening after dark with my Dad. We were there to buy milk and butter. I was about ten years old. The conversation that night was about their recently hearing a panther hollering in the nearby woods. They said the hollering sound like a woman screaming. Something about that story scared me and I was ready to go home, get into bed and pull the covers over my head.

John would hold small claims or debtors court in a small courthouse that fronted on Annistown Road behind E L Juhan's store (current day U S Auto). Without a gavel he would use his pocket knife to wrap court in session, bring order to the court room, issue a judgment or declare a case closed.

From that courthouse he managed the polls for elections in the Rock Bridge Militia District. At 7:00am he would declare the polls open and at 7:00pm he would stand at the front door and loudly proclaim "hear ye, hear ye the polls of the Rock Bridge Militia District are now closed". In the late sixties there was only one precinct with approximately 440 registered voters.

Ms. Ella was quite a cook. A longtime and valued friend and neighbor of the Campbell's was the Jim Mason family. Their farms were adjacent to each other. Wayne Mason, Grandson of Jim Mason, tells the story of when he and his brother Jimmy would leave school in the afternoon and go straight to their Grandmothers house next door to the school. They would checkout what she had to eat and then head straight to Ms. Ella's to see what she had to eat. According to Wayne Ms. Ella had a wood cook stove in one corner of her kitchen and an electric stove in another corner.

An embellished story was once told that Ms. Ella could be sitting on the front porch. She would spot John a quarter mile away walking home from church with the Preacher for lunch, unannounced. She would quickly get up walk through the house to the backyard, grab a chicken, wring its neck, pluck the feathers and have it the frying pan by the time John and the Preacher walked up on the porch.

Mr. John never learned to drive, walked most everywhere he went. Ms. Ella at his side they worked hard, raised a family, served God and were foundation stones of the Centerville community.

Good people, good memories!!

