

**There's Coal in "Them Thar Ridges"**

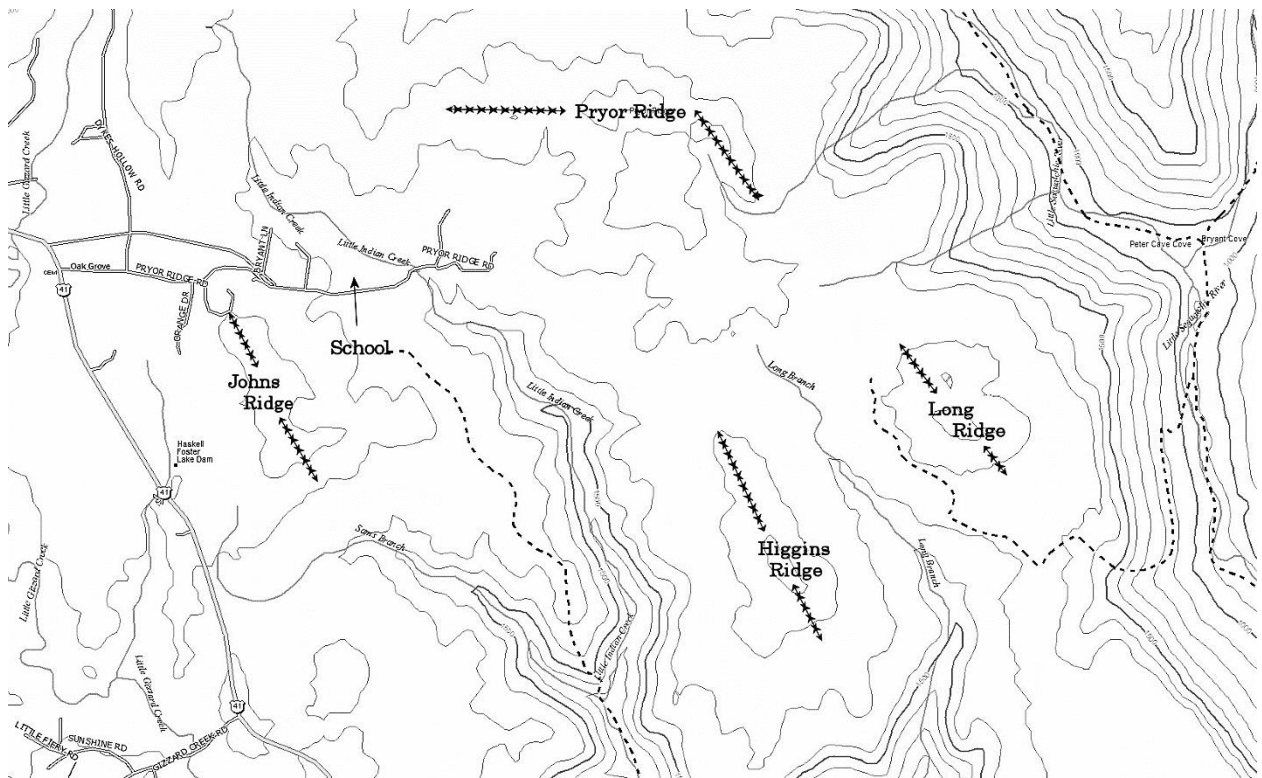
**By  
Jackie Layne Partin**

**2014**

# There's Coal in "Them Thar Ridges"

By Jackie Layne Partin

Clustered in their own private, enormous shelter of natural beauty are four ridges on our plateau in Marion County that are full of Grundy County history, much like my hometown of Monteagle with its two-county spread. The ridges are Pryor Ridge, Johns Ridge, Long Ridge and Higgins Ridge. Many of our Grundy families moved to be near these ridges while following the coal seams, and many who were born there moved back to remain part of Grundy County's history. As coal mining appeared to be waning in one area of the county, the coal company had already surveyed lands for other mining ventures wherever the seams could be followed. In this case, they had to jump the county line, but the company wanted the coal, and locals needed the work.



## The Four Ridges and Their Relationship to Each Other

On Apr. 9, 1903, Mr. Lee Bouldin wrote the following in the "Mrs. Grundy" newspaper: *"The Inexhaustible Mineral Resources of Grundy County – Within the confines of Grundy County the mineral wealth is unsurpassed. Covered by the great sand bluffs are Lead, Silver and Iron. But it is the Coal I wish to speak of. Beginning 10 or 15 feet above the limestone, there are five workable seams of coal, varying in thickness from one to sixteen feet. And each seam being so situated above each other in the proper distance to insure them all to be worked*

*without affecting one another. The first is the well known Bon Air coal. The second a fine blacksmithing and domestic, and also a very fine grade of coaking (coking? –jp) coal.*

*The third is of the same quality. The other two are well-known as the Tracy City seam, the top one not being worked at present, but will prove like the lower ones of good thickness where developed to any extent. You can see at a glance the magnitude of the coal wealth.*

*When we come to consider that the T. C. & I. R. R. Co. have been working from five hundred to one thousand men in their mines onto forty years, and have not yet worked over two thousand acres of land, we will see that there is plenty of coal left yet. Let us figure a moment say that Grundy County has an area of eighty square miles, now take our three lower seams of coal and average the thickness at three feet; we have one hundred and fifty three thousand six hundred acres in the three lower seams. Now we will say that the two upper ones contain twenty thousand acres, now we have one hundred and seventy-three thousand six hundred acres of workable coal amounting to six hundred and ninety-four million and four hundred thousand tons of coal allowing four thousand tons to the acre.*

*Now we will say that it will bring in the open market one dollar per ton, just think what wealth six hundred ninety four million four hundred thousand dollars, not counting the Lead, Silver and Iron, and saying nothing of the timber or agricultural advantages offered by the surface. We have truly a mine of treasure lying in old Grundy."*

What Mr. Lee Bouldin forgot to factor into his equation is that "all good things must come to an end" according to Geoffrey Chaucer, the father of English literature during the Middle Ages. The good Irish men, Scottish men, English men, the locally born men and the harshly treated, black convict laborers got the job done faster than one could figure on paper. Some immigrated here as well-trained coal miners; some had to work hard to feed their large families, and some were beaten and threatened into working like mules, obviously a new form of slavery. In 1882, the Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railroad Company produced 360,000 tons of coal in the state of Tennessee; let's just say, "Miners somewhere in this state were filling their lungs with coal dust, breaking their backs and losing their lives to bring up the coal for the company." Another factor was the size of the plateau; any land can only give up so much of its resources before it begins to cave. Let's also factor in that the cost for the coal company to dig coal or make coke on our plateau just might one day be less in other settings, in other states.

Consequently, the plateau was raped until just today (May 2, 2014) I stood atop one of the heaps of ugliness left behind on Long Ridge from the sucking out of the resources from our land. The scars will always be around us. However, many a family would have starved out had it not been for the beating that some areas of our mountain took at the hands of the coal companies and individual mine owners. And let us not

forget the unsightly scenes left behind by logging companies. Crossties, railroad cars and mining props required wood. I am reminded of the words **John Prine** wrote about such devastation.

*When I was a child my family would travel  
Down to western Kentucky where my parents were born  
There's a backwards old town that's often remembered  
So many times that all my mem'ries're worn.*

*Daddy won't you take me back to Muglenberg County  
Down by the Green River where paradise lay  
I'm sorry my son but you're too late in askin'*  
**Mr. Peabody's coal train has hauled it away.....**

*Then the coal company came with the world's largest shovels  
They tortured the timber and they stripped all the land  
They dug for the coal till the land was forsaken  
And wrote it all down as the progress of man.*

*Daddy won't you take me back to Muglenberg County  
Down by the Green River where paradise lay  
I'm sorry my son but you're too late in askin'*  
**Mr. Peabody's coal train has hauled it away.....**

As early as **1903** the railroad tracks were aiming for Coalmont and Nunley Ridge at Roddy Springs. In **1904**, Flat Branch was within sight of the section hands as they hammered away at the spikes driving them into the newly cut crossties. The surveying of **Pryor Ridge** was begun in **1905**, and in Nov. **1906**, Mr. Walden went to Clouse Hill to pay the fifty or sixty men still working there for the company; they were possibly retreat mining, removing the pillars of coal that served as supports during the major operations. Work began on the Pryor Ridge branch in July **1907** just as the Clouse Hill mining efforts were waning. It was during this time that the Sewanee Coal Company moved the company houses from Clouse Hill to Coalmont where Mr. Rogers of Meeks, TN moved into the first setup of a used company house on Speigle Street. In **1908** the railroad was nearing completion to **Pryor Ridge**. In **1909**, the **Pryor Ridge School** was completed for the children of the miners.

According to Baldy Curtis, in Oak Grove, not too far down the Pryor Ridge Road, there was a community called "Little Town." On down the road toward the vicinity of

Pryor Ridge, there was another community called "Big Town." It is imperative that we make a distinction between **Oak Grove** and **Pryor Ridge** because the old timers did. In **1911**, "*Mr. Crisp moved his family from Oak Grove to Pryor Ridge to work in the mines.*" Also in the same year, "*A large crowd of young people (from **Pryor Ridge** – jp) visited Oak Grove Sunday.*" The early settlers looked upon the two settlements as being autonomous. I assume today (2014), it is a matter of who one asks as to whether one lives in **Oak Grove** or **Pryor Ridge**.

When I asked current **Pryor Ridge** residents where the community, the ridge particularly, got its name, no one seemed to know. In 1880, Caroline (Hendrix) Pryor, widow of Jeremiah "Jerry" Pryor (1833-1875), and four of their children, China Isabelle, Rutha, Laura and Charles were living in District 1 of Marion County. These ridges usually got their names from families who either lived on top of them or at their bases. What the widow Pryor was doing up here on this plateau in the wilderness with her distantly scattered neighbors, the Longs, Shrums, Cannons, Harrises and other families is a mystery to me. Every family in the area at the time was farming, eking out a living with a mule and plow. Obviously, the soil delivered in the summer and fall, for the families stayed on.

Green Hill Pryor, father of Jeremiah Pryor, had money, so a deed somewhere may show that he owned the land that became known as **Pryor Ridge**. At the recording of the **1870** Census, Jeremiah, Caroline and children were still living in the Jasper area. Five years later in **1875**, Jeremiah had died and was buried in the Pryor family cemetery in Jasper. Perhaps between 1870 and 1875, Jeremiah listened to all the hoopla over coal mining in Tracy City and decided to get nearer by buying the land that became known as **Pryor Ridge**, or perhaps he wanted to get far back into the wilderness to farm virgin land. It is hard to believe that Caroline and four of her children, still at home, came to the plateau without Jeremiah, but she was here. At her death in **1889**, she either had previously left the plateau, or her body was carried to her beloved town of Jasper, TN for burial beside her husband in the Pryor Cemetery # 2.

Caroline Pryor's stone was on its side at the time this photo was taken.

Inscription: Caroline Pryor, born Apr. 20, 1831, died Sept. 28, 1889

Her husband, Jeremiah Pryor has no known marker but is also buried in the Pryor Cemetery # 2 in Jasper, TN.



Caroline's son, Charles A. stayed in the **Pryor Ridge** area and continued farming. He married Nettie May Randle, daughter of John and Mary Alice (Barlette) Randle. In **1900**, their nearest neighbors were William and Margaret Ann (Long) Caldwell. Charles and Nettie had a large family of children, some of whom were born in the **Pryor Ridge** area. However, before **1910**, they moved to the valley where several more children were born. Unfortunately, when Charles died on Mar. 14, **1917**, his death was judged by an inquest to be a suicide. He died at the age of forty-nine. He was still a farmer at the time of death. Another tragedy happened to Nettie in **1933**, when her son, Hershel Pryor accidentally drowned at the age of thirty. It seems logical that **Pryor Ridge** earned its name from this Pryor family, either through a generation who bought the land and passed it down to Jeremiah and Caroline, or they bought it themselves.

Coal from the Sewanee seam was eventually mined by the coal company out of two mines called **Pryor Ridge # 1** and **Pryor Ridge # 2**. Edward Lee Hampton was the owner of these two mines. In **1910**, Miller Turney Tipton was the foreman at the mines. Some surnames of the miners were: Nolan, Shrum, Layne, Burns, Brown, Smith, McCullough, Morgan, Stone, Dugan, Weaver, Sloan, Crisp, Sitz, Stump, Kilgore, Davis, Nunley, Dent, Box, McCoy, Manley, Dishroon, Trussell, Conry, Haynes, Bryant, Curtis, Foster, Crowe, Meeks, and many others. These men and their sons worked the different ridges around the area as the seams were discovered. A few like Jake Anderson and Lawrence Roberson were timber cutters for the mines; John Henley was a teamster who hauled coal. Robert Foster was an engineer in the mines. Tom Crowe engineered a dinky.

Andy Dykes drove a mule, and as a young man he was sometimes assigned to work like a current day traffic light. When rails from the different chambers intersected, someone had to control the activity at the cross rails. Andy once had to shut a door used for controlling air flow on a stubborn man who would not heed the "wait/stop command." This caused a backup in the man's line of traffic. The boss sided with Andy who was thinking of the safety of all miners.

On Dec. 22, **1910**, the *Mrs. Grundy* newspaper announced, "All employees' children of the Tennessee Consolidated and Nunley Ridge Coal Companies, 10 years of age and under will be presented with a present if they will call at the commissary Christmas morning between the hours of 8:30 and 10:30 o'clock. Children living at **Pryor Ridge** should call at the commissary at that place Saturday afternoon. Signed E. L. Hampton." On Christmas week of **1910**, young Harold Tipton wrote Santa this letter: "Dear Santa Claus, I want you to bring me a little train that will run around the track, an auto that will wind up and run, and firecrackers and Roman canons, candy, oranges and nuts. Send them to **Pryor Ridge** for I will be there." Charles Harold Tipton was the son of Miller Turney and Louise (Holloway) Tipton.

In **1911**, the coal company was building another new residence at Pryor Ridge. As in other mining areas, the company built row houses of different sizes to rent to the miners. A commissary was built and manned; J. E. Bryant became the new storekeeper at **Pryor Ridge**. "**Mrs. Grundy**" **1913**, G. E. Bryan has moved his family here (Tracy City – jp) from Pryor Ridge and has assumed his duties as storekeeper for the T. C. C. Company at this place. Z. F. Abernathy will have charge of the store at **Pryor Ridge**." J. E. Bryant and G. E. Bryan seemed to have been the same person, but with different writers making the comments. It is possible that he is James E. Bryant, son of Houston and Abigail (Tate) Bryant. If so, then after his parents' deaths, he at one time became the head of the household with younger brothers and sisters depending on him.

In October **1909**, William Nunley was hurt in a **Pryor Ridge** mine. Accidents happened at and around the mines as seen in this news article in January **1912** "C. P. "Pink" Adams met with a very serious accident at Pryor Ridge one day last week. A shot or blast that was fired in an adjoining place in the mines came through to his place, burning him considerably about the face and eyes, and it is thought the sight of one eye is entirely lost." In **1913**, "Bert Cox was badly injured by falling slate in the mine at Pryor Ridge Monday afternoon. He suffered a broken leg besides other injuries." And in the same year we read, "**Fire at Pryor Ridge** – One of the Tennessee Consolidated Coal Company's houses, occupied by Will Davis, was destroyed by fire last Thursday about 12 o'clock. It caught from a trash or brush pile nearby and gained too much headway before being discovered. Most all of the contents were saved. An adjoining building caught fire but was extinguished."

In **1915**, “President Peyton and other officials of the N. C. & St. L. Ry., came up Wednesday on their special train, and went out to **Pryor Ridge** and other points.” One wonders if they were interested in checking out the safety measures in place for the miners or just getting an overall picture of the money that was coming in for the company – I make that comment this month of May **2014**, nearly one hundred years later, on the heels of the current headlines reading: “Turkey’s (the country of Turkey –jp) mine disaster toll touches 282...142 unaccounted for...”

Mrs. Grundy, Feb. 18, **1915**, we read: “CRUSHED IN MINES – S. R. Rusk (Rust – jp) Meets With Fatal Accident – Mr. S. R. Rust, a highly respected citizen was severely mashed by slate falling on him while engaged in his work at No. 1 mines at **Pryor Ridge** Wednesday afternoon. At this writing it cannot be ascertained whether he is fatally hurt but we learn that he is mashed thru the breast. On account of his advanced age we have grave fears as to his recovery.” Samuel R. Rust would have been around seventy-years-old when this accident happened. Thankfully his children were grown. His wife Susan (Shrum) Rust was listed as a widow in 1920.

In “Mrs. Grundy”, Nov. 20, **1924**, we read: “**Big Fire In Pryor Ridge** – on last Saturday night about 10 o’clock the Store building, Rooming House and tippie belonging to the Tennessee Consolidated Coal Co., was destroyed by fire of unknown origin, but it is thought incendiary origin. Also two cars loaded with chestnut wood were also destroyed. No one lived in the house and (the) store hasn’t run for some months. The loss runs up in the thousands of dollars.” This leads me to believe that the **coal company** work in these ridge areas was finished in the year 1924 as far as the **company** was concerned. However, private mine operators carried on with smaller underground operations; dog hole mining and strip mining continued in some ridges for years to come. Some of the men who operated and/or worked in these mines were Edgar Meeks and his son-in-law, Jim Dunwoody, Waldo Myers, Jerry DeWitt Curtis and Charles Dykes.



**Charles Dykes, son of Andy and Hallie (Sanders) Dykes as a young boy living on Pigeon Springs Rd. He grew up and became a coal miner.**



On Nov. 11, 1933 in the Sequatchie News we read that, *"it was authoritatively stated that the road across Cumberland Mountain from this place to Tracy City connecting with the highway to McMinnville will be built this winter. The grade will be up the mountain road here which will be widened and graded to the summit, after which connection will be made with the old road known as the "Higginbotham turnpike," famous for being traveled by stages bearing soldiers from the Mexican War. There is already a good road from Tracy City to the Marion county line. The distance is about twelve miles and it is said slate from the Pryor Ridge coal dump will be used for a basis, followed by ridge gravel. The work will be under charge of James Moore, road superintendent for Marion County, who is quoted as saying that the road would be built this winter."* At least, all the destruction of the Pryor ridge was helpful in building up the roads for the plateau.

The **Pryor Ridge** School stood near where the Dan Wesley Green family lived at (N-35.240224, W-85.668534) in a wooded area about 1700 feet east of the junction of Pryor Ridge Rd. and Tram Rd. Not many people remember that this was not actually the first school building in the area. Baldy Curtis told me that children who were scattered out in the wilderness before Pryor Ridge School was build attended a small school somewhere near Indian Creek. Nan Coppinger, Ruth Foster, a Mr. Swafford, John Goforth, James Hogan and Elmer Bryant, to name a few, were public school teachers in the new school – *Grundy County Times*, Jan. 7, 1914: *"Mr. James Hogan has returned to Pryor Ridge and will begin his school after three weeks vacation."* Hershel Curtis remembers Miss Ruth Foster as one of his teachers at Pryor Ridge School. Read his comments on Miss Foster at:

<http://grundycountyhistory.org/Pryor/MsFoster.pdf>

Maggie (Curtis) Nolan and Charles Abe Slatton attended school a few years behind Hershel, graduating from the eighth grade in the school building which originally was a frame building with one long room. Later a division was placed inside to form two rooms. There were double doors on the front leading one to believe that it may have been built with the thoughts of having religious or community meetings in the same building. On Sunday morning, Aug. 4, 1912, there were nineteen persons baptized by the Rev. William Martin near Pryor Ridge School. Twenty-seven joined the church, and there were still eight more to be baptized with six more conversions on Sunday night. On July 2, 1914, the Sequatchie News reported that *"the Campbellites are holding a revival at Pryor Ridge. They will baptize Monday at the Jim Green swimming hole."* This was a good beginning for the spiritual needs of the reasonably new community and church.

Some years later Maggie remembers when the Highland Baptist Church in Chattanooga came over on Sunday afternoons to hold services in the schoolhouse. It was much like I remember when I visited my grandparents in Clouse Hill; Mr. Harvey Kilby, a character larger than life, showed up at the Clouse Hill School on some Sunday

afternoons to enlighten all my cousins and me about how much Jesus loves us. Jesus really, really loved us around Christmas time when Mr. Kilby brought us all an orange. Finally, a need for a better meeting place at Pryor Ridge spurred on the believers to build a church building between Pryor Ridge Rd. and the Tram Rd. within the area where the two roads merged. One little story that I heard years ago from some of my distant Layne cousins came about when three young girls, who lived at Pryor Ridge and had a devout Bible-believing mother, thought it would be funny to burn the one-room meeting house where I am sure that Mom made her daughters attend with her. They did burn the building, but I could never get anyone to tell me what happened after that.

In **1913**, some folks around Tracy City were concerned that the coal in and around the area was running out. Others had faith that the coal would last for several more years, thus giving the miners continuous work. *"The Mountain Herald", Thursday, May 15, 1913 – "The contract to build a spur road off from the Pryor Ridge branch to **Johns Ridge** has been let to the Silica roofing and Constructing Company of this place and work was begun there Tuesday morning. This road will be about one mile long and will run into a vast amount of undeveloped coal fields which gives the Tracy City knockers the jim-jams. We are glad Tracy City has a concern that can handle such big jobs. The **Johns Ridge** seam is a good seam of coal and those who are predicting the death of Tracy City every time the moon changes will now have another predict coming. It is true that about all the mines in Tracy have been worked out, but there is lots of undeveloped territory yet in Grundy County that will be giving employment to hundreds of men and keeping Tracy City alive after all the knockers 'kicked the bucket.'"*

*"Mrs. Grundy", Thursday, May 22, 1913 – New Road – A new line of track will be built from Pryor Ridge to **Johns Ridge** to get to new coal openings in that ridge. The contract has been given to the Silica Roofing & Construction Company. The line will be about one mile long and will open up a wide area of undeveloped coal fields of superior quality coal."*

According to the family notes of Norma Joyce (Nix) Shrum, **John's Ridge** was 200 acres of land in the Oak Grove community which were owned by **John F. Shrum**, son of Moses and Mary (Parson) Shrum. John F. was born ca. **1833** in Marion Co., and died after **1910**, at which time he was already a widower. He and his wife are buried at Burns Cemetery not too far from the ridge as the crow flies. **Johns Ridge** is off to the right of Pryor Ridge Rd. Some men who worked there were Prince Thompson, Gilman Meeks, Leon Crisp, Hershel Eldridge, Frankie Crisp, and Oscar Meeks, who was injured in the mines.

**Long Ridge Mine** – some old Grundy County miners remember working in that mine, but little is really known about it. We can begin to piece together a short history for preservation by standing at the metal cemetery marker and the one remaining

fieldstone engraved John (1823) and Ceally Long (1828). We are able to immediately understand where the named **Long Ridge, Long Mine, Long Branch** and **Long Cemetery** got their names. John Anderson Long and his wife, Ceally (Taylor) Long, are the two people known to be buried at the cemetery. No other graves can be seen; no stone markers are visible, but old timers remember several graves, five or six, being present as they walked pass the area years ago.

On Saturday nights, laughter and fun could be enjoyed at the home of the Thomas Wiley “Tom” Crowe family. Tom Crowe, son of Wiley and Sarah (Hickey) Crowe, moved his family from Georgia via Chattanooga to the Pryor Ridge area between 1910 and 1920. He came for work being qualified as a locomotive engineer. He and his wife Edna (Howell) Crowe had a house full of talented children—Edgar Wiley “Ed”; Mary (Robert Overton Layne); Rosa Lee (Arthur Lee Layne; Quinton Silas Brown); Edith (John H. Burns); Ethel (Foster Stephens) and William Carl; James Wallace and Ernest Van. A big area in their yard was cleared, as though swept with a broom, for the lively events, weather permitting. Since all the Crowes could play musical instruments, their house or yard was the place to be for unwinding from the strenuous week of logging or mining.



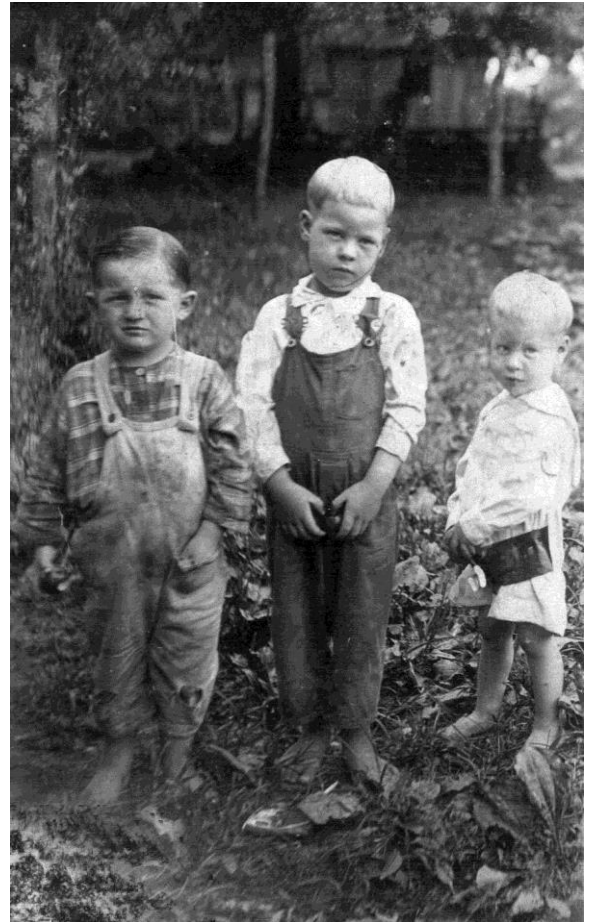
**Mary (Crowe) Layne with her husband, Robert Overton Layne; Robert’s father Sim Layne also worked in the Pryor Ridge Mines**

“Old man Stump” (*probably William M. Stump, m. Senie Tate--jp*) lived out toward **Long Ridge Cemetery** according to Hershel Curtis. He had an old, deaf mule, and when Hershel was twelve (ca. **1929**), he plowed for Mr. Stump using the mule. When he wanted the mule to go, he just shook the plow; when he wanted the mule to stop, he lifted up the plow handles until the point was deep in the ground. “Hershel, what kind of pay

did you get for plowing at such a young age?" His answer was, "Well, I got the use of the mule on our place!"



**Hershel Dewitt Curtis**



**L to R: Charles Haynes, Hershel Dewitt Curtis and Mitchell Curtis**

During corn planting season, Hershel's sister, Maggie, recalled that her dad had a field cleared where the whole family put in a crop, right near the Long graves. Their father built a small house at the graves so that the family would have some place to eat, have shelter and sometimes sleep while the corn crop was being tended. Since Maggie was born in **1924**, and her father died in **1935**, I reckon that this may have happened just about time for Hershel to use old man Stump's deaf mule to help the family in the cornfield. Although the area of the four ridges, from a map's point of view, seemed to be quite large, the families of all the ridges traveled around enjoying each other's company.



**The metal marker in front of the ancient tree has the words “Long Cemetery” on it. There is one lone stone marker. According to some old timers there are several more graves at the tiny cemetery. However, the fieldstone markers are long gone.**



**With the help of some kitchen flour, the words and birthdates**

**“In Memory of John (1823) and**

**Cealey (1828) Long” sprang forth.**

John Anderson Long was born in Lexington County, South Carolina around 1823. He married Millie Price around 1850 in Lexington Co., SC, and together they had the following children: Barbara Drucilla (1851-1939 – William B. Sharp); Catherine S. “Kate” (b. 1853 – Jacob “Jake” Stafford); Sim Wesley (1856-1916 – Nancy Beatrice Thomas), and Harriett Margaret Ann (1857-1946 – William Caldwell). John Anderson’s second wife was Ceally/Celia Taylor whom he married around 1859/60 in SC, and together they had these children: Henry Alfred (1863-1930 – Ella Rhoda Caldwell); Mary Jane (1863-1938 – Francis Marion Caldwell); Marsilar “Marcie” (1865-1949 – Preston Tate); Sarah Elizabeth (1868-1936 – James Alexander Green); and Lucy Ann (William Burns).



**Mary Jane (Long) Caldwell, daughter of John Anderson and Ceally (Taylor) Long**



**Harriett Margaret (Long) Caldwell, daughter of John Anderson and Millie (Price) Long**

We can reason from the Census records and birthplaces that the family moved from South Carolina to Tennessee after Mary Jane's birth in SC in 1863, and Marsilar's birth in TN in 1865. In other words, they came to the mountainous wilderness of Marion Co., TN between 1863 and 1865. A family story handed down through the ages is that John Anderson Long stood atop a mountain view "...looking toward Nashville and watching the Union troops advance toward Chattanooga, Tenn..." It is believed that he may have settled his family in their new surroundings and marched off to join the Confederacy; however, that research is ongoing.

John Long was a farmer by occupation. It is my opinion that John and Ceally had passed on long before the actual mining of the ridge named after them began. Their son Henry Alfred Long cut timber in the Pryor Ridge area and may well have mined in the ridge named after his father. Hershel Dewitt Curtis' dad did work in the **Long Ridge** mines. Charles Dykes worked in those mines too, carefully noticing the Long graves as he walked by each working day. I have spoken with the caretaker of the land where the Long Cemetery is. He assured me that the graves would not be destroyed. We, the public, also need to understand that the land is privately owned and must not be destroyed or littered in any way when we visit this small burial ground. John and Ceally have been shown respect all these many years, so now we must respect the land around them.



**William M. and Harriett Margaret Ann (Long) Caldwell**

Hershel's maternal grandfather was Dan Wesley Green who liked to hunt in the wilderness around those mines. On one hunt at **Long Creek** out near Bryant's Cove, Mr. Dan accidentally shot his own dog. The story goes that the dog treed, and as Dan approached the tree with his weak light, he saw an eye shining in the tree. He thought it was a coon, so he took his shot and out fell his dog. Unknown to Dan, his dog had climbed the leaning tree, but Dan never thought about it being up there. Hershel remembers that his grandfather came home the next morning telling the story, and Hershel wanted to go see the spot where the dog had died. He noticed that between the camp fire and the tree where the dog had been shot, his grandfather had worn a path going back and forth wondering if the dog might survive through the night, but it died.

**Higgins Ridge** is a slightly smaller ridge that lies between **Little Indian Creek** and **Long Branch**. It never seemed to have been mined underground, but some strip mining did happen there later. As usual, there must have been some "Higgins" folks living on that ridge, very near it, or in this case, below it, way below, in the cove whose sides ascended up to Low Gap and on to the actual ridge. In the beginning, with all the glories of God's creation, Higgins Ridge stood right along with the previous afore mentioned ridges. I always like to start researching an event or person with an absolute, something I know is correct, something or someone who is tangible to me. So my absolutely correct and tangible fact is that one of my maternal uncles, John Benton Meeks, married Vallie Elizabeth "Liz" **Higgins**, a young woman whose baby blue— with a touch of Irish green—eyes could melt the hardest of hearts. She and her eleven brothers and sisters were born way back in Sequatchie Cove in an area that once was full of Higgins and

Coppinger families. It is my understanding that folks in the area use Coppinger Cove and Sequatchie Cove names interchangeably.

To get to the Cove, one traveled Coppinger Cove Road, and “*where the pavement ends and the cove begins,*” according to George Bryson Higgins, Vallie Elizabeth’s brother, the old Higgins home place could be found up an old rough logging road—in a little while. One would follow the road until the place called the **Wide Ford** of the creek was reached. That was where the Crutchfield house and mill was located, and if one crossed the creek to the right, one of the original Higgins homesteads could be found. One could get to **Higgins Ridge**, which rose above the Higgins families in the Cove, by following one of the well-trodden foot paths from the valley and climb right on up to the sun above, possibly going through the Low Gap route, or if already on the plateau, by turning right off Pryor Ridge Rd. onto one of the little wagon, logging, or mining roads between Long Branch and Little Indian Creek. The ridge was cut last year (2013) by a logging company, so she just keeps on giving.



**The Wide Ford Today**





**Frog Rock – a widely known marker in the area somewhat like a “Witness Tree”**



**John Benton and Valli Elizabeth (Higgins) Meeks**

Beyond **Wide Ford** further up the road in the **Injun** was the end of the journey for **George Washington Higgins**, born in Virginia, and **Nancy (Lemons) Higgins**, born in Hamilton Co., TN. They built a house for themselves in Little Indian Cove. If we go by their ages given in the 1850 Census, then George was born around **1820** and Nancy around **1818**. One of their male descendants who has had DNA research done, told me that he has six percent Indian blood in his veins which he thinks could only have come through Nancy Lemons. Some years ago, he found a marriage record in Hamilton County court records listing the fact that George Higgins married Nancy “*an Indian woman.*” And yes, he did get a copy and will make a conscious effort to see if he can find it.

A little after **1850**, George and Nancy, along with their son, **James Henry “Polk” Higgins**, around six at the time, left Hamilton County for the small town of Jasper, TN in Marion County. Marion County was a couple years older than Hamilton County. In **1853** in Marion Co., a deed for 400 acres of land was granted to George and Absalom Higgins. A year later another deed for 100 acres was registered by the same two. Both grants were signed by Andrew Johnson who was Tennessee’s governor at the time. The two men are believed to be brothers. There was an Absalom H. Higgins in the Confederate 35<sup>th</sup> TN INF CO L who may have been the man spoken of above, but that research can be left to someone else.

George started a boot and shoe business in Jasper, and later Polk had a gunsmith/blacksmith shop. George owned several town lots in Jasper which made him

a lot of money. He and Nancy came to the area with land grants that covered the area known as Higgins Ridge.

In the middle of all George's wheeling and dealing in real estate and grants, his young son, Polk Higgins, found himself caught up in the Civil War wherein he fought for both sides, starting out in the Confederate Army. Polk was a lot like a young man that I have written about before, Martin Van Buren Phipps. One may read about Martin on the following site:

<http://grundycountyhistory.org/Pryor/Phipps.pdf>

Oh, to be honest, they were a lot alike since they both rode with Calvin Brixey according to a knowledgeable descendant. Men in Brixey's group usually had mustered in with the Confederacy then deserted to join the 1<sup>st</sup> Tennessee Independent Vidette Cavalry Company D (Union). It is said that Polk met Calvin Brixey in Tracy City, Tennessee, where he probably mustered in with Company D which was formed at Tracy City and Nashville. They laid out their plans to become members of the "Home Guard," which could have been a good thing, but many of the younger ones turned into bands of marauders, wreaking havoc on all people including their own. Brixeyites seemed to have been the very young soldiers, those that would still have been disciplined by their fathers in the woodshed had they still been home. Under the guise of being watchdogs for the Union, they became violent men, thieves, killers, wild and drunk most of the time. It appears that Polk Higgins just was not interested in settling down to normalcy in his military life, in his marriages, with his children or any other area.

James Henry "Polk", like Martin V. B. Phipps, James Conaster, "Spunkie Bill" Layne, a young man named McChristian, and others, spread quickly away from Calvin Brixey's presence, just in time to keep from being hanged themselves. If a Brixeyite got away with his raiding and looting and left a dangling, empty, windblown, noose on a sturdy oak tree branch with his name on it, he quickly looked for a hiding place. Not only was the U. S. Army looking for him, but the local people of the many Tennessee areas and members of his own family who had grown to hate him would have enjoyed putting a noose around his neck. It is no wonder that Polk later moved on to the Higgins' land, way up in Sequatchie/Coppinger Cove!

In 1877, two more parcels of land grants were gained, one in Indian Cove and one at the Wide Ford in Coppinger Cove. This is where the Higgins finally settled. George declared the Cove to be the "best cow country he had ever seen," and one family story is that it was a great place to hide \$1800 in gold. Whether or not George hid gold probably will never be known, but it is said that it was looked for by many. If it was ever found,

no one talked about it. One fellow who was known to have diligently searched for it, suddenly moved away from the area never to be seen again. The land supposedly ran from Little Sequatchie Creek, where Polk built his house, to Owens Spring near where George and Nancy built their house. Little Indian/Injun creek went underground for some distance as it flowed from the plateau and came up again at Owens Spring. I have been to the end of Coppinger Cove Road where it meets the logging road. Traveling along one can easily tell that he or she is entering no man's land, or we might choose to say, "The finest place on God's green earth."



**Entrance to Dixon Cove**



**Ghost from the past stands before one gets to the end of the pavement**



**Double Chimneys Near the Old Logging Rd.**



**Where the Pavement Ends and the Logging Rd. Begins**

Polk Higgins had three marriages: 1) Susan Dicie Bryant, m. ca. 1864, the year he mustered out of military service; 2) Elizabeth "Ocie" Childers, m. ca. 1870; and 3) Susannah Wright, m. 1895. Polk and his first wife, Susan, had two children: Malissa Anne (Jesse Coppinger) and Orpha Josephine, (Isham Alexander Coppinger, brother to Jesse). (*If one*

looks at Orpha's death certificate, there are discrepancies on parentage, but she never left her beloved Marion Co., TN. She is buried in Lassater Cemetery.) On **July 11, 1870**, Polk and Susan Dicie and their two daughters were still together as a family. However, one month later on **Aug. 17, 1870**, Susan and the little girls were living in her father's household, using her maiden name of Briant/Bryant instead of Higgins. They divorced or simply parted ways. Susan lived on with her daughter Malissa Ann and husband Jesse until she died in **1909**.



**James Henry "Polk" Higgins and his first wife Susan (Bryant) Higgins**



**Left:**

**Malissa Anne (Higgins) Coppinger**

**{Daughter of James Henry "Polk"  
and  
Susan (Bryant) Higgins}**

For some unknown reason, Polk and his new wife Elizabeth went to Virginia where their first son was born, but soon returned to Marion County, TN. They were the parents of ten children: **George Abner** (1871-1950, m. Martha Jane "Mattie or Mat" Crutchfield); **John Arthur** (1872-1947, m. Liddie Margaret Kilgore); **Nancy Jane** (1875-1946, m. Joseph "Joe" Kilgore); **James Henry "Haze"** (1877-1956, m. Maggie Stone); **Jacob Daniel "Jake"** (1880-1951, m. several wives); **William Joseph "Tobe"** (1882-1965, Melissa White); **Waymon** (1884-1884); **Amos Wiley** (1885-1965, m. Carrie Layne); **Charles Edward** (1887-1962, m. Nancy Alice Layne); and **Mary Louise "Dollie"** (b.1891-d. ca. 1922, buried at Sells Graveyard), m. Robert Herman.



**Standing L to R: Pauline Higgins, Amos Wiley Higgins, Leonard Higgins and Charles Virgil Green**

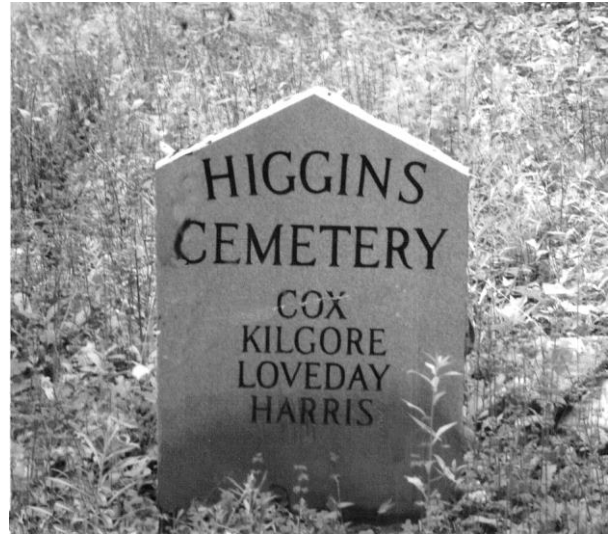
**Seated: Carrie (Layne) Higgins holding son Richard and Dora Bell (Higgins) Green holding daughter Carrie Avis Green**

Polk and Elizabeth divorced between the conception of Mary Louise around 1891 and the year 1895 when Polk married his third wife Susannah Wright. Elizabeth and her young ones lived on at the old Higgins place in Coppinger Cove and supported themselves by farming. Some assume that at her death in 1900, her body was taken to Sardis Cemetery in Victoria, TN to be buried near her in-laws. However, she never came out of her beloved sanctuary and was buried about one hundred yards from her home. Two of her great-grandchildren, twins who died as babies, were buried there also. Their mother was Abigail Frances "Abbie" (Higgins) Harris. It is believed that one of her sons possibly baby Waymon was also buried there. According to Charles Higgins, there are approximately twenty-two more graves, all fieldstones. Others known to be buried there are: a set of stillborn twins of George Abner and Martha Jane Higgins; George Washington Higgins and his wife Nancy. Charles Higgins believes that Absalom Higgins

is buried there also. The surnames Loveday, Cox, Kilgore and Harris are also thought to be buried there.



**Gravesite of Elizabeth (Childers) Higgins**



**Memorial Stone of other families  
thought to be buried at the Old Higgins  
Cemetery (cemetery photos courtesy of  
Charles Higgins)**

Descendants of Polk call the burial ground the Old Higgins Cemetery. The old house was at the back of the Higgins field, but only a chimney remains today, and of course, the graves which are a few yards up a rise from the chimney.

**James Henry "Haze" Higgins  
and wife Laurel Magnolia  
"Maggie" (Stone) Higgins;**

**Haze was a son of Polk and  
Elizabeth (Childers) Higgins**

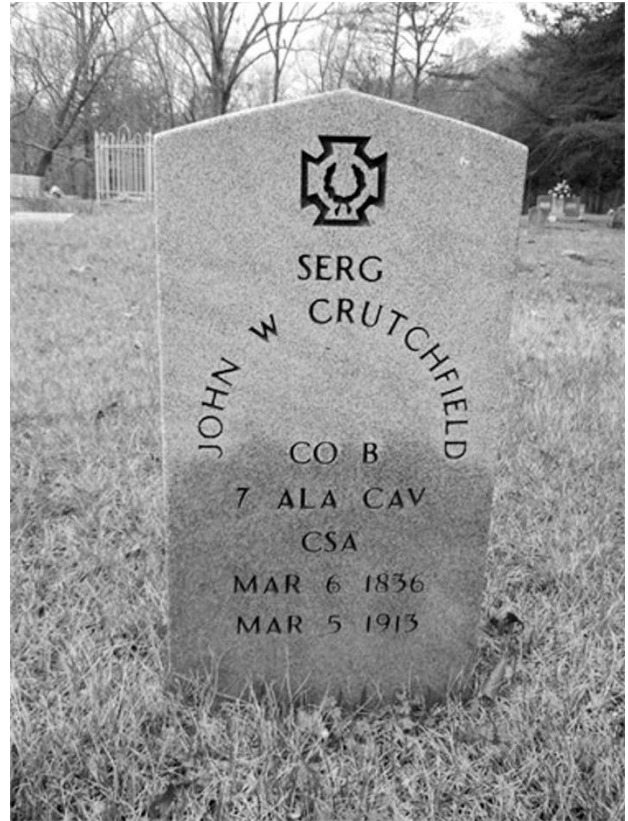


James Henry "Polk" had no children by his third wife Susannah. On the night of Aug. 4, 1905, she became quite ill, sick enough for Polk to run to the nearest neighbor and ask for help. While returning quickly toward home to be with his wife, Polk dropped

dead. The neighbors, who were coming to help with Susannah, found Polk's lifeless body in the path. He was buried at the Sardis Cemetery.



**James Henry "Polk" Higgins' Military Stone at Sardis Cemetery (1843-1905)**



**John W. Crutchfield Military Stone at Baptist Hill Cemetery in Jasper, TN (1836-1913)**

Polk's son, George Abner, and Martha "Mattie" (Crutchfield) Higgins lived up in Injun Cove all their married lives. Mattie was the daughter of John W. and Cynthia Elizabeth (Cunningham) Crutchfield. She was born in Rhea Co., and as a little girl came through Dade Co., GA before moving to Marion Co., TN, where her father built a shingle mill near the Wide Ford. John W. Crutchfield's military record reads like a book. What a man! When he arrived back home, he wrote for Sequatchie Valley News under the pseudonym of "Bill Dooley." His daughter Mattie gave him seven grandchildren: Emma Alice (Prince Early Nunley, Sr.), Abigail Frances (Robert Harris), Cecil Ted, **Henry Alexander** (Libbie Lou Katie Caldwell), Herbert Franklin (Essie Pauline Womack), John Wesley (Bessie Lee Ramsey), and George Daniel (Edna Odell Griffith).



Seated L to R:

Cynthia Elizabeth (Cunningham) Crutchfield  
and husband John W. Crutchfield

Standing L to R: son, Hiram Alexander  
"Alex" Crutchfield, daughter, Florence  
(Crutchfield) Webb, (2<sup>nd</sup> wife of David  
William Webb), son, Austin Franklin  
Crutchfield and grandson, William  
Crutchfield, Jr. (9)



George Abner and Martha "Mattie"  
(Crutchfield) Higgins

SEQUACHEE, TENN., THURSDAY, FEB. 14, 1952

## Happiness In "Injun"



Mildred Bill Walling

This poem is dedicated to Mrs. Mattie Higgins, whom I learned to love while teaching in Coppinger Cove. To my way of thinking she and Uncle George were two fine people.

Uncle George and Aunt Mattie, so sturdy and strong,  
Lived in "Injun" Cove away from the throng.  
To this union seven babes were born, to them so dear,  
And filled their home with laughter and cheer,  
Uncle George was tall, had a mustache under his nose,  
Happy as he could be, without any woes,  
While Aunt Mattie as quiet a mouse was she;  
Ruffled black bonnet, a long dress, so all one could see  
Was the tips of the toes of her shiny black shoes;  
Carrying a handbag that had long been used,  
Wearing an apron as she came down the street  
With ruffles, and tied in the back so neat,  
Each Tuesday morn the rolling store they would meet,  
Many of their friends and relatives they'd greet;  
After their purchases they had made  
And the rolling store clerk had been paid,  
Then back to "Injun" Cove with their sacks  
Happily they'd retrace their tracks.

No more are they seen walking together  
Down the road, fair or stormy weather,  
Death's Angel carried Uncle George beyond,  
Aunt Mattie has left the home of which she was so fond,

A poem depicting the admiration for  
George and Mattie Higgins

**Henry Alexander Higgins** married Libbie Lou “Katie” Caldwell. Katie was the daughter of George Morgan and Annie (Nolan) Caldwell. George Morgan was the son of Francis Morgan and Mary Jane (**Long**) Caldwell. Now we have the **Long family** connected to the **Higgins family**. The ridges were just across **Long Branch** from each other, not an easy trek, but a lively walk for sure. The children of Henry Alexander and Katie were: George Bryson (1930-1998); **Vallie Elizabeth** (1932-2000); Johnny Jackson (1935-2002); James Henry (1937-2003); Lonnie Rabon (1939-2000); Gerald Cecil (1942-1975); Alice Francis (1944); Carolyn Faye (1946-1989); Glen Daniel (1948-2004); Elvia Dean (1950), Larry Wayne (1952) and Sadie Joyce (1957).



**L to R, back: James Henry, Johnny Jackson, Vallie Elizabeth, Katie;  
Front: Gerald Cecil, Lonnie Rabon, Alice Francis and Carolyn Faye**

On one of those ridges, my Uncle John Meeks hid in a cornfield and watched the young lady who would become his wife. He was so in love with her, but he was too shy to leave his vantage point from the cornfield. Vallie Elizabeth saw him and called him out of the field to meet her. Every Saturday if he could get the old family mule, he rode about fifteen miles from Clouse Hill to Injun Cove to see Vallie Elizabeth. If he could find no mule, he walked. He was in love and that was all that mattered. Soon the Higgins family moved to Clouse Hill to operate a saw mill for another man. John and Liz got married and built their first little house across from the Clouse Hill Cemetery. They soon moved to Summerhouse Mountain in Alabama where Liz was right at home, far away from the city, back, way back, and up, way up, in a land that time had forgotten.

This dissertation on Pryor Ridge, Johns Ridge, Longs Ridge and Higgins Ridge could be a lifetime project for a younger person than I. However, at this point in my research for this little story, I personally feel as though I have loaded twenty-five cars of coal, and I have my metal tags to prove it; I feel as though I have climbed ridges and cliffs, crossed creeks at their fords, until my sides, back and legs ache, and my lungs are so full of coal dust that I can hardly breathe; I'm certain I have finished my homework of readin', writin' and 'rithmetic; sadly, I feel as though I have attended several miners' funerals, but happily, I have worshipped my God and got my orange; and in my wild, murderous, other personality, I rode with the Brixeyites, but switched sides and helped hang him to that tree. Still yet, in spite of all this, **"I owe my soul to the Company Store."**

**NOTE:** One day my friends are going to stop answering the phone calls and emails from me—I'm always full of questions. My thanks go to all the people who still do answer their phones and emails, and to all those wonderful family genealogists who have done extensive family research and shared with me. Thanks to Gary and Sheryl (Higgins) Brewer, Levonne Price, Charles Higgins, Herschel Curtis, Charles Dykes, Rose (Brown) Slatton, Maggie (Curtis) Nolan, Frank Stevens, David Meeks, Euline Harris for her massive news clipping works, and the digital Grundy County Herald newspapers copyrighted by Ralph Thompson. May the Pryor, John Shrum, Long and Higgins descendants live on to remember this part of Marion County and the contributions their ancestors made to it. I'm certain I have made mistakes, for those I am sorry and would like to hear from you about them. [jackiepartin@blomand.net](mailto:jackiepartin@blomand.net)