

Homes of History: Strickland shares memories of the Valley Creek area

Written by By Ava Barlow, Staff Writer
Thursday, 24 March 2011 13:31 -

March 17, 2011 - Last week, 86-year-old Mary Jones Strickland took a ride down memory lane to the Valley Creek area where she was born and raised. Both sets of her grandparents, Jim and Sudie Dorsett and the Sim Jones', lived in the Valley Creek area and her parents, Charlie and Bell Jones, along with Strickland and her siblings lived on part of the land owned by the Dorsett grandparents.

Though the old school house is long gone, the old school site, located just to the east of the current Valley Creek Baptist Church, has the storm cellar still sitting on its site. A new modern metal barn covers the spot where the old schoolhouse sat. Being a student of Valley Creek School, Strickland, remembers that they went to the storm cellar often and that the school building was sitting over the site of several graves, which the kids had discovered. Whether the people who built the school knew there were graves there or not was never clear to the students.

Strickland's family lived just south of the school site and the old barn that stood near the home they occupied is still partly standing. She also recalls playing in the barn at her grandfather Dorsett's house just a little further south still, and that barn still stands as well. Seeing the old barns through the eyes of one who has fond memories was in reality a good lesson in history.

Strickland shared that where the current church sits was the baseball diamond and the road turned west, beside the current church building. The original church sat close to the entry to the cemetery and set back into the woods some - the trees providing a covering for revival services held outdoors. The roads were mud roads during rainy weather until later in her life when she remembered white rock was laid so people could still travel during rainy weather. She also talked about walking the roads in the area going to her other set of grandparents, the Sim Jones', or going to a friend's house. With no television to occupy the kids' time, the kids used the time to attend school, play in barns, visit with relatives, walk from home to home, and of course help the parents with chores.

A little further north of the school site, George and Rebecca Dorsett, her aunt and uncle, lived and Strickland remembers when they bought the place that it had a beautiful two-story house on the hill, which was torn down, and a new house was built below the crest of the hill - this was in 1927. There was a water well at the old house site and a garden was planted just north of the current home. When the pond iced over, the kids would skate on it, without any fear of falling through since the pond was shallow. The house built in 1927 is still in excellent condition with one added room on it. Another mystery of her childhood was that the adults would not talk about

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why the two-story house was torn down and the new one built.

Several other barns that existed when Strickland was a young child are still standing today and in use - even one that is near the Sims Jones farm, her paternal grandparents.

In 1869, Howard L. Parmele arrived in the area and bought the land that would become the Valley Creek community from John B. Seaman and Charles C. Peck, and moved his wife and two grown daughters, Bessie and Moddie, and a grandson, Asa, to the community in 1872. The Presbyterian U. S. A. Church sent a missionary group of 12 families to settle the area along with the Parmeles.

Families mentioned during the ride who lived in the area were the Fosters, O. S. Ferguson, Casey, Jim and Sudie Dorsett, W. N. Owens, Mildred Merle Bowers, Mary Ruth Mead, Howard Netherton, George and Rebecca Dorsett, Murrell family, Harvey Owens, George Williams, Higgins, Tucker, Steele, Kent, George and Rebecca McCaslin, and Hack and Maria Netherton. This is not nearly a complete list of the residents of the area, just the ones mentioned on the drive.

Valley Creek is identified today by two road signs, a Baptist church and a cemetery, but in the late 1800's the area was very prosperous with a cotton gin, a grist mill where grain and corn were brought for grinding, a large sawmill, a busy blacksmith shop, a two-story hotel, a drug store, barber shop, a mill where wagon wheel felons, house blocks and street paving blocks were made from Bois d' arc wood, and a general merchandise store that carried all necessary articles for pioneer living. The store doubled as the post office and mail was also delivered by horseback as far north as Bonham. There was also a processing plant where seed was extracted from Bois d' arc apples and shipped up north where they were planted thickly for hedge rows or fences. The families grew crops that were sold and the money used to buy shoes and items of food they could not grow.

Today - and even in the beginning - Valley Creek has beautiful glimpses of rolling hills and valleys from nearly every property in the area. Just east of the existing road and behind the homes there is a beautiful valley from there over to FM 1553, and the same view mirrors on the west sides and north to Randolph. County roads snake through the trees like someone knew where they were going when they carved the paths, when in reality - from above - it looks like a spider web of roads that connect and reconnect.

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Thanks for the beautiful drive and historical visit seen through your eyes, Ms. Strickland.