

MEMORIES OF PRESTON ROBERTS

As told to Aleta (Roberts) Vomocil

(This segment was titled, "A Backward Glance, This Started in Kentucky," and was typed on the old Royal manual typewriter which he used for so many years.)

"My mother was born May 20, 1851, ten years before the Civil War. Later she was married to my father, James Caudill Roberts. To this union was born 9 children. The first was

Jimmie, (or Tim) born 1871, then Linville, then Elvin,
then Lillie, then Silas, then Burke then Laura then Rader,
then Preston Roberts, born October 20, 1894.

I, Preston, was born on the upper reaches of a creek called Slate Branch. When I was two years old my father bought a farm across the mountain on a creek called Meat Scaffold. built a two room log house with a fireplace between the two rooms with an opening to each room. There I lived 11 years. We were a poor family. My father made some large troughs out of some large poplar logs, then he would take a cow hide and some wood ashes and put in the trough and cover with water and let stand until he could remove the hair from the hide. Then he would put the hide in another trough with some oak bark until it was tanned - ready for use. He made shoes for the family out of the hide. He fastened the soles on the shoe with wooden pegs split out of hard maple, and I can remember when the snow was on the ground I did not have any shoes.

They made what we called a hopper by making a frame large at the top, small at the bottom and lined it with boards, put a drain in the bottom, put wood ashes in it, poured water over the ashes and water that soaked through the ashes came out as lye. Then they took meat scraps and the refuse from butchering and put the lye and meat scraps in a vessel and made soap for the family by boiling them together.

In the beginning of spring when it began to thaw after the winter season, my father would, what we called, tap the hard maple trees by chopping a notch in it with a slant downward, then bore a hole upward into the notch and put a drain in it to carry the maple water into a wooden trough. Then we boys would carry the water to a central location and boil the water down until it became syrup. Then we would take it to the house and daddy would boil it until it became sugar, then pour it into teacups and we would sell them for 10 cents a piece. We could make 7 or 8 teacups of sugar a day.

The land we farmed was very steep and rough. We gathered the corn in sleds, and some of the ground was so steep we could not plow it with a single horse. We would dig a place for the corn with a hoe and drop the corn and cover it with a hoe, then farm it with a hoe. We raised about what we ate. We pickled beans in a barrel and also corn; and smoked apples by preparing the apples, then putting them in a split basket and putting a saucer in the bottom of a barrel, then setting some sulfur on fire in the saucer, then put a

stick through the handle of the basket and hanging it in the barrel and putting a quilt over the top of the barrel. When it was through then put them into a vessel and they would keep all winter - real good eating. When they dug the potatoes in the fall, daddy would dig a pit in the ground and line it with straw and put the potatoes in it with some turnips and make a mound of dirt over them. They would keep all winter. Then the next spring he would use some of the potatoes to plant again. We raised a lot of beans. We would pick some after they dried, then shell them, and we would have beans to eat. We also dried some apples part of the time.

We had to go 2 1/2 miles to school and walk. I remember when there was frost on the ground, I went to school barefooted. Times were hard. A man's wages were 50 cents a day. We had biscuits for breakfast on Sunday mornings and corn bread the rest of the time.

My mother became ill about 1898 and became an invalid. She sat in a little cane bottom chair without arms. We picked her up, chair and all, to move her. At times she would sit without speaking for long periods of time. In about 1904 my father became ill with tuberculosis and in 1908 we moved from Kentucky to Oklahoma in search of health, but we went back to Kentucky and in 1912 daddy died there. Then Mother and I came back to Oklahoma, and in 1914 mother died. In the winter of 1908 and 1909 some people prayed for my mother and for awhile she was able to be up. Then she became ill with breast cancer which took her life. In the winter of 1908 and 1909 I was converted and became a Christian and was baptized in Grand River; and in 1912 I renewed my consecration and received the Baptism with the Holy Ghost. In 1916 Bertie Roberts and I were married and to this union was born 5 children: J.C. or James Charles, Opal, Ruth, Vivian and Aleta. Vivian departed this life February 1, 1932, 10 days before she would have been 6 years old.

The Lord called me into the ministry at an early age and I was ordained into the Assembly of God Movement in 1920. After pastoring some 13 churches I am now retired, just waiting for the summons from on high when the Lord will say, it is enough, come home."

(Another time of asking questions and getting him to reminisce about the past.)

I went to school in a one-room building (a single log house) in Breathitt County, Kentucky. Some schoolmates were Courtney Creech and Otie Stidum. The children had to build the fire in the morning. One morning Otie Stidum said, "Courtney, your lips are just as blue-ue-ue-ue!" (This was accompanied by much laughter.)

One day there was a blacksnake in the school, and a boy we called Blackie ran and jumped on the snake with bare feet.

One day boys were chewing paper wads and blowing them. I (Preston) blew a paper wad into Ledford Craft's ear!!

We children sat on long benches and each child had a slate board on which to write. We went to school barefoot when frost was on the ground.

Another time we went to school in a dwelling house. The teacher went home at noon for lunch and left the children there. Courtney Creech was as timid as could be. I (Preston) would get him down between the seats. He would say, "let me up and I'll let you alone."

I saw my first car in 1908. It had high wheels with buggy spokes and a drive wheel with chair to motor.

We had to go to the County Seat - Jackson, Kentucky, for merchandise. Quick Sand Creek was 90 miles long. We would go down to Jackson in a friend's boat, 60 ft long. It was eight miles from Jackson to the mountains. The wagon road ruts were so deep they went to the hub of the wheels.

We grew most of our own food. We only bought flour and salt. We would pick beans and dry them. Then string them on a string and shell them. We picked and smoked apples; also had pickled beets and corn.

Nearly everyone had typhoid fever. The doctor got the cows for payment of his bill. In 1898 my oldest brother, Tim, died with typhoid fever. Later we got another cow. I worked for .50 cents a day on a farm. When the workers came into the house for dinner - if they pushed their plate back after eating the foreman would say, "are you done eating? Then grab your hat and break!"

Home was two hand-hewn log houses side-by-side with space between. (Each house was just one room.) There was a large fireplace built between the houses that opened into each room. There was a large porch across the side. The house was located by a beautiful stream of clear water, but you couldn't drink it because it had T. B. germs in it. Every time I was told to go do chores, I would say, "Wait til I warm my back!" It was warm next to the fireplace, but cold in the house away from the fire.

The people where we lived in Kentucky were very rough people. One time a man and his wife and son-in-law had an argument, then made up. The son-in-law and his brother went to the old man's place to have a "stew" (a drinking party). After the party, only the brother of the son-in-law was left. The father, mother and son-in-law were all killed. The Davidsons shot constantly. One woman was shot five times, one Davidson was killed and they killed the lawman.

There was a narrow-gauge railroad that ran on the south fork of the creek. People were making moonshine up the creek. Two lawmen from Jackson went up to investigate. They sent one of the men back on the train dead and one wounded.

Angeline & Linville's daughter, Rose, married Jack Davidson. They carried guns for neighbors - used shoulder holsters. Rose's was a .45 and Davidson's was a .38. Every

morning when Rose dressed she strapped on her pistol. The other man was a brother-in-law to Uncle Burke Roberts. His name was Cy Watkins - he and Burke married sisters.

We farmed steep mountain land. Farmed corn so steep we couldn't get horses up there. Corn was farmed there 18 years straight. Raised large ears. It rained nearly every day. Had apple trees that had been bearing fruit for 50 years. Hardly ever had a drought. We picked beans in the fall of the year. We planted the beans with the corn and the bean vines climbed the corn stalks. We spread the beans on the floor on quilts and had bean hullings. A lot of neighbors came in and made a party out of it. One party lasted 19 days. We had fresh green beans until Christmas. We would dig a hole and line it with straw and put in fresh potatoes, then put boards over it and pile on dirt. They would keep all winter. We would raise cabbage and leave it on the ground. Then as needed, cut and bring it into the house and let it thaw. We would put milk in a bucket, tie a rope through the handle and lower it into the well. The well was dug by hand and was approximately 15 to 20 feet deep. I have helped dig wells up to 50 ft. deep. We lined them with rock. We used a windlass at the top. Pulled rock out and also men got out the same way. Sometimes we climbed out hand over hand up the rope.

Much later in Oklahoma I contracted to dig a well for a school. I walled it up and put a box at the top. I was the lowest bidder at \$120. Took me five days, and I made \$20 a day.

There was a cemetery across from where we lived in Kentucky. They carried corpses up the mountain to the cemetery. All caskets were homemade. They were shaped wide through the shoulders and tapered to the head and the feet - like European caskets. In digging graves they had to dig down to the shale, then use an ax to cut a hole just to the shape of the casket, put boards on top, then covered with dirt. One way was so steep we had to go through a ravine, to get to the grave. My brother Tim was buried on a flat place on the farm.

I worked in the coal mines in Kentucky. In drilling in mines we struck a stream and dammed it up, put a faucet in it to provide water. Each person had a brass tank, threw it into the bottom of the coal bin, then loaded coal onto the top of it. We got credit for how much was loaded in one day. (I loaded 20 tons a day.)

When I was 22 years old I started working in the lead mines in Oklahoma. I made \$3.50 a day. They had a 250 ft shaft straight down. They had a large bucket to lower us down the shaft into the mine. If you were on the outside, you put one leg into the bucket and held on. We pulled lead out and hoisted men with steam made from gas. One day the gas went out. They would pull a little, then set blocks, then jerk some more, then rest. The water got quite high before the people got out.

Alec Wooldridge worked on the outside and got \$2.25 a day. I worked on the inside and got \$3.50. One day I talked him into working inside the mine. (They had cars that would hold 1,000 men.) He worked inside until noon when we went up for lunch. After lunch

he wouldn't go back down. He said, "I promised the Lord that if I ever got out of there alive, I would never go back in!"

I liked working in mines. It was out of the bad weather. Down there the temperature was even, summer and winter. We wore carbide lights on the front of our caps.

One day a car got off track and one of the men and I tried to put it back on and I mashed my finger. There were always accidents in the coal mines. One man was run over by a car and cut off both legs and killed him.

They were just trying to get unions started when I worked at McRoberts, Kentucky. There was trouble between whites and blacks. The blacks were "bent" to gamble. Some white boys were gambling in a black community and the white boys were winning. The blacks got a white boy, held him and shot him. Then the whites got some blacks and hung them, then shot them down. They ran the blacks out of the mining camp. During the first world war, 1918, there were tons and tons of coal piled up on top of the ground. Spontaneous combustion caused a large fire that burned for months and months.

I held church in a little school house there. There was a man who didn't want his wife to go to church. He would come to the school house and peak into windows with a pistol in his hand. Men would walk down the streets shooting pistols into air.

In Oklahoma I lived at Council Hollow and walked seven miles to Turkey Ford to church. Sometimes services lasted many hours, and revivals went on for weeks. At times when I walked home after service the birds would already be singing for day.

At Turkey Ford, Oklahoma, a man shot into church and grazed his wife's chest. Men were bad to drink.

In 1927 I was pastoring a church in Afton, Oklahoma. One of the deacons, Bro. Myers, and I drove to Kentucky. We got to within 125 miles of our destination and had to leave the car in a garage and ride the train the rest of the way. It cost us .50 cents a week to park the car in the garage. We left our possessions in the car and they were not bothered. We came through a big flood on the way back to Oklahoma.

The folks were rough in Kentucky. My grandfather on mother's side was a prize fighter. His name was James Hogg and he weighed 240 lbs. He had long arms and hands that hung almost to his knees. He was never beaten. One time a man bit his nose off and they sewed it back on. Another time he bit off a man's finger and swallowed it. I never saw him. He fought without gloves. He was Scots-Irish.

My grandfather Roberts was a small man and never weighed over 145 lbs. He was also named Preston Roberts. He was born March 23, 1827, married Rebecca Caudill - died March 29, 1909. Buried at Lazarus Back Cemetery, Jackson, Kentucky. One son was James Caudill Roberts; born November 19, 1855, in Letcher County, Kentucky, died

March 13, 1912 with tuberculosis. He married Permelia Francis Hogg in 1873. (Permelia was born May 20, 1851.) Her father was James (Jim) Hogg and her mother was Barbara Jane Harkey. As stated earlier, they had nine children. They were:

1. Jimmie (Tim) Roberts born 1871 died 1898 (typhoid fever)
2. James Linville Roberts born January 2, 1874 died May 27, 1927
 married Angeline Eldridge
3. Elvin Roberts born April 9, 1876 died January 31, 1948
 married Belle Calhoun (September 20, 1894)
 married Nettie Hogg
4. Lillie Roberts (Burton) born May 8, 1879(81?) died August 23, 1944
 married Mace Burton
5. Silas Boggs Roberts born August 31, 1883 died December 25, 1956
 married Ula Mae Gross May 19, 1917
6. Burke Roberts born February 5, 1886 died November 25, 1953
 married Della Black April 25, 1906
7. Laura Belle Roberts born July 5, 1888 died August 29, 1961
 married James Monroe Youngblood December 30, 1908
 also was married to Walter Henry and Elbert Martin
8. Allen Rader Roberts born July 6, 1891 died May 1, 1958
 married Nora Belle Linn May 1, 1915
9. Preston Roberts born October 20, 1894 died April 8, 1978
 married Bertie Frances Roberts March 29, 1916

My grandfather, Preston, fought in the Civil War in 1861. (Both grandfathers fought in the Civil War.) He told the story about his boots freezing to the stirrups. He would knock them loose with a hammer. Also, he would build a large fire, rake the coals away, and roll two logs close together. He would then sleep between the logs with a blanket over him. This way he slept warm all night. When the snow fell, it made it ever warmer.

My father, James Caudill Roberts, made shoes, tanned his own leather, farmed and ran a government still in Kentucky (for medicine). Sometimes he made illegal whisky and made apple brandy for a neighbor. He ran the still day and night. One time he started home with a gallon jug; fell asleep and broke the jug. He always got whiskey given to him at Christmastime. I never bought a drop of whiskey or wanted a taste for 63 years. (His age when he told this story.)

John Howard's sister married John Baldrige. He was mean to John's sister. They started shooting at each other. John hit and killed him (Baldrige). He only served two years in the penitentiary. I worked for Green Howard (John's brother). He had two girls he called Sister Boo, and Milk Pitty Boo. I also worked for Miles Back in Quick Sand, Kentucky. I got a dollar a day and board and room for working on a farm.

Mother told me about him. During the Civil War all men had gone to war. He then took boys to the fields to do the work. Miles wanted work that day. I worked for him when I was a boy. He had two girls about my age and older (Met and Nern). They tried to be good to me but I was so bashful! They made chocolate candy and tried to give me some, but I said no. Then when I built a fire in the kitchen next morning I found that chocolate and bit into it. But, it was a square of unsweetened baking chocolate and was bitter!!

I worked for one family that had three girls. They called them Kicker, Blister, and Sister. Said they'd wait and let the girls pick out their own names when they were grown.

I worked in a sawmill. They cut 9,500 ft of lumber a day - had five band saws. They worked clearing land. They were of wealthy means. Several people boarded there. All ate at the same time. Once they had peaches for dinner with fresh cream. I was too bashful to ask them to pass the cream so I pored buttermilk on mine. They favored me. He had a bunch of men working for him. The women decided to paper the house and he pulled me off the outside job to help them. I was 17. There were four boys from that family. One changed his name from Back to Bach. My father's sister, Elizabeth Back, had 16 children.

My mother's brothers were Stephen, Henry, and Hiram D. Hogg. Her sister, Missouri Jane Hogg, married Squire Frazier in Jackson, Kentucky. Their children were Mary Jane, Stephen, Angeline, Charley, Wilburn, Arthur, and Edward. Henry Hogg was in the Spanish American War, 1898. He met a wealthy Philippino woman and absconded with her money. He went to the penitentiary for it.

My brothers' and sisters' children were:

Tim died early and never married.

Linville & Angeline: Rose married Jack Davidson & had eight children
Marvin married Mary, had two girls

Elvin & Belle: Dorsey, Ica, Sarah, Bessie, Ethel, Thelma, Conard

Lillie & Mace Burton: Carl, Violet, Gordon, Laurie, Irene, Andrew

Silas and Ula: Dayton, Charlie Mack, Howard Louis, John L.

Burke & Della: Bea, Jim, Carrie, J.C., Maggie, Cynthia, Jessie Linville

Laura & Monroe Youngblood: Cledith
" & Walter Henry: Clint, Retha, Densil Hope
" & Elbert Martin: Paul, Margie

Rader & Nora:

Adele married Jack Risner & had 5 boys

Chester married Faye & had 3 boys

Preston Linn married Kathleen and had a girl & a boy,
Preston, Jr

Preston & Bertie:

J.C., Opal, Ruth, Vivian, & Aleta