

# HARPER MEMORIES

By Robert Harper

John Harper Sr. was born about 1735. He and his brother had a shipping and exporting business that operated out of Philadelphia and possibly Baltimore. The family is believed to have owned plantations in Maryland and Virginia. At the time of the Revolutionary War, they outfitted several ships to harass and loot the British shipping. His son, John Harper Jr. was a captain of one such ship. John Harper. Sr., died about 1813 in Monroe County, Virginia. His first wife's name is unknown. His second wife was Jane Logan who was the widow of Robert Reborn, Jr., who was murdered by Robert McMahan in 1768. One of John's children, Samuel Harper, was the first schoolmaster of Monroe County, Virginia, now West Virginia.

John Harper Jr., son of John Harper, Sr., was born in Maryland about 1760. During the Revolutionary war, John, Jr., served as an officer on one of his father's ships that harassed the British shipping. His ship was captured by the British. The British amused themselves by hacking the gold buttons on John's uniform and pushing him around. Later John was paroled, which was the custom at that time with officers. He became a farmer in Giles County, Virginia. In 1810, he was one of the first settlers in what is now known as Raleigh County, West Virginia. John settled on Clear Fork of Coal River near Clear Creek. Not much is know of John, Jr. Some records show that in 1815, he owned land next to his son Joseph Harper in Raleigh County. John, Jr., died about 1830.

Joseph Harper Sr., son of John Harper, Jr. was born on September 16, 1791. About 1811. he settled in the area of Giles County, Virginia, which is now Raleigh County. He and his father, John, Jr., were among the first to settler in Raleigh County. They settled on Clear Fork of Coal River. On August 3, 1814, Joseph married Frances "Fannie" Stover in Giles County. She was born August 21, 1801, in Virginia

Joseph was a prominent citizen in his day. Records show the Governor of Virginia appointed him as Sheriff of Fayette County. He served from 1848 to 1850. Joseph was the only citizen of Fayette County, which later became Raleigh County, to serve in that capacity. Land record show that he owned land on the Clear Fork of Coal River and on Millers Camp Branch (now Harper, Raleigh County). Joseph, Sr., died November 30, 1877, in Raleigh County, and is buried at the Workman's Creek Cemetery, at Clear Creek.

Children of Joseph and Frances:

1. Jacob Harper was born on February 19, 1816, probably in Giles County. He died in 1863 in Richmond, Virginia. Jacob married Elvira Snuffer who was born on September 17, 1819. They were married on January 7, 1836. Elvira died on April 3, 1868.

2. Sarah "Sallie" Harper was born about 1818 in Virginia. She died about 1880. Sarah married John Shumate who was born about 1812 in Virginia. They were married on December 7, 1837, in Fayette County by Reverend Matthew Ellison.

3. Rachel Harper was born on January 25, 1820, in Logan County, Virginia. Rachel died on June 23, 1902, in Beckley. She is buried at the Stanley Cemetery at Beckley. Rachel married George W. Bailey who was born about October 1819 in Franklin County, Virginia. They were married on July 29, 1841, in Fayette County by Reverend Matthew Ellison. George died in Raleigh County and is buried at the Stanley Cemetery at Beckley.

4. Samuel Harper was born about 1821 and died about 1880. The Reverend Claiborne Curtis married Samuel and Nancy C. Massey on September 20, 1848, in Fayette County. Nancy was born about 1823 in Virginia.

5. Hamilton "Ham" Harper, born in March 1822 in Logan County, died about 1896. He married first Mary Beckett about 1848. Mary was born about 1828 in Virginia and died on June 12, 1895, in Raleigh County. Hamilton and Mary Harper are buried at the Harper Family Cemetery at Sandlick. Hamilton married second Julia Massey on May 14, 1896, in Mattsville, Raleigh County. At the time of their marriage, Julia was 45 years of age, being born about 1851 in Raleigh County. They were married by William Turner, Minister of the Gospel.

In March 1861, Hamilton owned 246 acres on the head waters of Sandlick. The deed was signed by John Letcher, Governor of Virginia.

Hamilton served in the Union Army during the Civil War. He served in Captain William Turner's company of the Home Guards from December 25, 1863, to February 22 1865.

On June 18 1866, he obtained 505 acres on the Middle Fork of Sandlick. The deed was signed by Arthur I. Borman, Governor of West Virginia.

Children of Hamilton and Mary were Sarah F., Elizabeth, Samuel P., **James B.**, Leonard C., Mary A., Joseph W., and Ulysses G. Leonard C. Harper was a teacher at the Rocky Point School.

6. Elizabeth "Betz" Harper was born about January 1825 in Fayette County. She was married first to Samuel Wills on December 26, 1845, in Fayette Co VA. The marriage was performed by Reverend Matthew Ellison. Elizabeth was married second to Guy D. Williams on May 21, 1861, in Raleigh County. Guy was born about April 13, 1837, in Giles Co VA. He died about 1865. Elizabeth was married third to John Arnold, Jr., who was born about 1807 in Patrick County, Virginia. They were married on April 10, 1868, in Raleigh County by William H. Bailey. John died April 1, 1879, in Raleigh County.

7. John Harper was born about 1829 and died about 1880. He married Wilmonette (Wilmouth) Massey on August 25, 1850. The Reverend Claiborne Curtis performed the

ceremony in Raleigh County. Wilmonette was born about 1824-1828, probably in Logan County.

8. Joseph Harper, Jr., born September 21, 1833, died September 21, 1853, on Coal River, Raleigh County.

9. James Harper, born about 1835, died September 19, 1853, on Coal River, Raleigh County.

10. Daniel Harper, born about 1838 in Fayette County, died about 1906. He is buried on the Jerry Daniel Farm located on the Headwaters of Lake Stephens, Raleigh County. Daniel married first Angeline Stover. He married second Martha Jane Stover on August 9, 1875 in Raleigh County. The marriage was performed by William Turner. Martha was born about 1845 in Fayette County.

## James Benjamin Harper

Son of Hamilton (Ham) Harper

James Benjamin Harper was born February 12, 1857, at Sandlick, Raleigh County, West Virginia. His first marriage was to Sarah Clementine Dillon. Captain William Turner married them December 19, 1877. James and Sarah had only one child named Nora Bell Harper. She died of diphtheria on December 11, 1889. James' second marriage was to Victoria Alice Vaughan, the widow of Francis H. Brickey. Victoria's mother was a descendent of the Reverend John Turner, a very prominent Virginian. James and Victoria lived on an adjoining farm to his father Hamilton "Ham" Harper on Sandlick, Raleigh County, West Virginia. James and Victoria both are buried at the Harper Family Cemetery at Sandlick. James and Victoria's children were **Elliott Turner**, Pearl H., John B., Zora who died at age five, Jennetta, and Beulah.

## Elliott Turner Harper

Son of James Benjamin Harper

Elliott was born May 12, 1885. He married Macie Pearl Williams, daughter of Thomas and Nancy (Atha) Williams of Sandlick, Raleigh County, West Virginia.

It is said that Elliott was a good and kind man until he started drinking. On one occasion, he came home and started to harass Macie. She ran from him, but he followed her in a rage. She ran to a place where he kept a loaded pistol. She took the pistol from its hiding place, and told him not to come any closer or "I'll shoot you." He took a step toward her, and she shot him. He died in minutes. It was not long before the



**Elliott Turner Harper**

sheriff came and took Macie to be arraigned before the judge. After reading the report, the judge dismiss all the charges and she returned to her home. There are other accounts of this story. I guess the whole truth is buried with Elliott and Macie. They are buried at the Harper Family Cemetery, at Sandlick. Their childrens' names are Hurl H., Mable, Mildred, Thelma, Virginia, Thomas, Edna, Nora and Iris; Edna was the twin of Thomas. Edna and Virginia died at an early age.

Source: Sometime a Hillbilly, Always a Mountaineer by Sherman R Williams

## Jacob Harper

Son of Joseph Harper, Sr.

Jacob's occupation was a schoolteacher and deputy sheriff of Raleigh County. He was the first school teacher of the Trap Hill District according to the 1935 edition of the Trap Hill High's annual, "The Trapper." In 1860 he had ten pupils enrolled when he open the first school. The school was made of logs and had a dirt floor. Furniture consisted of benches without backs. He had very few books.

Land record has him owning about 560 acres on Marsh Fork of Coal River.

Jacob Harper married Elvira Snuffer on January 7, 1836. Their children were Andrew, Evaline, George, John W., Joseph S., **James**, Paulina, Henry H., William, Jacob F., Elvira, Mary, and Calvin. Andrew and George served as sheriffs of Raleigh County.

The story is that Jacob Harper was taken from his home in the middle of the night and killed by a party of Confederate outlaws. They took him across the hill in sight of Eccles, West Virginia. That day he had sold some cattle and had \$300.00 on him. Realizing his position, he slipped his wallet into a hole in the fence as he was crossing it. The wallet was found later by a family member.

Jacob died April 4, 1863, and is buried in the Harper Family Cemetery at Harper, Raleigh County, West Virginia.

Two other accounts of his death can be found in West Virginia History by Hila Appleton Richardson and History of Middle New River Settlements by David E. Johnston .

## James Westlake Harper

Son of Jacob Harper

James Westlake Harper, son of Jacob and Elvira, was born March 29, 1847. He died when he was 89 years of age, at his home on Reservoir Road. About two years prior to his death, he realized that he could not expect to live a great deal longer. He began preparing for his death and his funeral. He made a list of pallbearers and visited an

undertaking establishment. When he knew that his death was imminent, he questioned relatives as to the hour of day they thought most suitable for his funeral service. An afternoon service at 2:30 was decided upon. His response was, "Then let it be 2:30, and not at 3 o'clock. I am a man who is always on time."

In his early life, he was a public school teacher, constable in Town District, mail carrier on routes extending from Beckley to Logan Court House and to Madison in Boone County. In 1884, he was elected sheriff of Raleigh County. He was proud of the fact that, at the end of his term as sheriff, records showed that the county court owed him \$30.68. He was enumerator of the census in 1880 and again in 1890. He served as jury commissioner for 20 years.

## Henry Harrison Harper

Son of Jacob Harper

Henry Harrison Harper was born February 1, 1851. He was the eighth of 13 children born to Jacob and Francis Stover Harper. He was one of the most prominent Harpers of his time. He was a tall handsome man with brown hair and dark eyes. He was a gifted public speaker. He used these skills as a teacher, school trustee, church member, and in the Raleigh County Courts, where he acted as his own lawyer. He was married twice. His first marriage was to Jane Kincaid. They had two children. Their names were Minnie and Henrietta. Henrietta died at an early age. Minnie operated one of Henry's stores at Harper.

About 1881, he was married for the second time to Ella Davis. Together they had nine children whose names are Bertie, French, Macie, Enoch, Charles W., Thomas J., Henry Herbert, Pency Lee, and Flossie F.

French was postmaster at Harper. Thomas J. installed the first phone and electric light system in Harper. He later sold them to C&P Telephone Company and the Appalachian Power Company.

Henry's farm of over 500 acres employed some 25 farm hands, three cooks, and a teamster who hauled goods to his five stores in Harper, Beckley, Sandlick, Clear Creek, and Eccles. He also owned and operated two sawmills, one at Paint Creek and one at Harper, and a grist mill for grind corn. In addition, he was solely responsible for the construction and maintenance of The Methodist Church at Harper. The coming of the railway to Harper was a long-time dream of his. He finally realized this dream by giving the railway the right of way they needed to build. His only demand was that a station be put at Harper and that all passenger train must stop there. These demands resulted in a lawsuit that reached the Supreme Court, which he ultimately won. The church he built burned down in 1924 by a spark from a passing train.

The town of Harper was named for Henry Harrison Harper. It was previously known as Miller's Camp Branch. The name change was made October 17, 1903. He was survived by 24 grandchildren. Eight were teachers, two were models, one a lieutenant colonel in

army intelligence, and one was Colonel Arthur Rogers, commander of the famous Jolly Rogers of the 90th Bomb Group of the Pacific during World War II.

Henry Harrison Harper died December 5, 1931, and is buried at the Harper Family Cemetery, Harper, Raleigh County, West Virginia.

**Mary E. Harper**  
Wife of Henry Harrison Harper

When Mrs. Mary Ella Harper, widow of H. H. Harper, died at the age of 71, her obituary stated: "A native of the section in which she spent practically all of her life, Mrs. Harper, daughter of the late William and Lucinda (Williams) Davis, early in life united with the Mt. Tabor Church, and remained to the end of her days one of its most devoted members. She was a woman whose sterling character was a byword in the community and her loss is therefore, all the greater to friends as well as immediate members of her family."

Mary was affectionately called "Ma Harper." She was known for her hospitality and Christian fellowship. She was a friend to anyone sick or in need. She was known for her faith in God. People who heard her pray were so moved that they came from all over to request her to pray for them.

Mary Ella Harper died December 5, 1931, and is buried at the Harper Family Cemetery, Harper, Raleigh County, West Virginia.

Sources:

Notes on the Harper and McGee families by Claude D Kinsman

Court record researched by James Kinsman.

Newspaper clippings

Personal knowledge