

Reverend William Sherman Snuffer

By Darry L. Snuffer

Reverend William Sherman Snuffer, the second child of Lee (June 28, 1879 to January 23, 1958) and Sarah Kansas (1878-1908) Allen Snuffer, was born in Bolt, West Virginia on April 12, 1903. He was raised on his father's 46 ½ acre farm at the foot of Guyandotte Mountain on the headwaters of Breckenridge Creek. This property had been given to Lee by his father, Russell Snuffer, and at one time had been part of a tract of land known as the Wilson Abbot Lot #2.

At the age of five, William and his two sisters, Hettie Pearl (March 11, 1900 to September 14, 1989) and Ada Mae (October 30, 1904 to December 5, 1997), lost their mother to tuberculosis. Lee assumed the burden of working the farm, and raising the family. William and his sisters were required to do chores before engaging in other activities, including an education. During the winter months, after the crops were in, they attended the local one-room log school at Bolt. This school was known as the Low Gap School, and it was located on William's great uncle Cyrus Snuffer's property. In 1914, Low Gap and two other schools were incorporated into the new Fairview Elementary School. William managed to finish the fourth grade before he was distracted by the interests of young manhood.

Lee fell in love and married Juda Bailey (November 25, 1894 to August 2, 1966) on September 29, 1912. Soon William had six more brothers and sisters:

1. Sadie Alice Snuffer was born August 15, 1913, and died March 30, 1997.
2. Walter Russell Snuffer was born on February 16, 1915, and died August 2, 1936.
3. Reverend Woodrow Wilson Snuffer was born April 14, 1917 and died in January 1994.
4. Frank Robert Snuffer is still living.
5. Laura Jane Snuffer is still living.
6. Reverend Thomas Lewis Snuffer is still living.

William stayed on the farm, helping his Dad, until he was 17 years old, when he left to make it on his own.

Around this time the Virginian Railroad bought the right of way leading to the new coal mine development in Glen Rogers. He moved there, finding his first job laying railroad track. In the 1920's, Raleigh Wyoming Mining Company became the area's

largest employer, drawing hundreds of people into Glen Rogers. It became one of the most prosperous sections of the state; but, with prosperity came crime. Caught up in the spirit of the "Roaring Twenties," Glen Rogers became famous for saloons, gambling, prostitutes, and illegal liquor. William soon learned sin is fun for a season and began to engage in all the activities.

William saw there was money to be made selling liquor and started moonshine still. His brother, Walter, developed pneumonia operating the still on a cold spring day and died a few months later. Although hurt by the loss of his brother, he continued to engage in this illegal activity, unaware the law was watching him.

William fell in love and married Sada Frances Bailey on October 7, 1927. She was born on April 24, 1912, and was the daughter of Austin Bailey (June 12, 1887 to November 17, 1942) and Nancy Mae Snuffer (September 16, 1895 to June 1, 1996). They had eight children.

In November 1928, William Snuffer saw that the authorities were closing in on his moonshine operation, so he fled to Detroit, Michigan, with his young wife, using the name William Allen to avoid detection by Federal Agents. His first two children were born under false names. He started driving a car and found work in a Canadian warehouse, working there until it was safe to return home in 1932.

Upon returning home he found employment at the Raleigh Wyoming Mining Company at Glen Rogers. He stayed at this mine until 1948, when his health forced him to retire. Because he started working in the mines before they organized a union, he couldn't count those years toward his pension. Although he retired because of doctors' orders, he did not have enough time in a union mine and was denied a pension. He appealed this decision to Washington, D.C., to no avail. After the mines unionized, he became a member of Local Union #6004, and remained a union sympathizer all his life.

After returning from Michigan, they lived in Bolt for a while. Later he bought a lease on White Oak Creek in Wyoming Co, located up the hollow from the Pine Grove Baptist Church in Ravencliff.

By August 1936, William had come to the end of his line, physically and spiritually. Between working in the mines, smoking cigarettes, and booze, his health was on the edge of ruin. He looked back on his life and saw that the wages of sin is death. Realizing a change was needed, he accepted Jesus Christ into his heart. God called him to preach. He was licensed by the Church of God in March 1943, and started his ministry. He pastored several churches including; Glen Fork, Glen Rogers, Mohegan, Artie, Clarks Gap, Hotchkiss, Hartwell, Prince, Black Eagle, and Allen Junction.

Tragedy struck during the summer of 1951. Sada, pregnant with her ninth child was having a hard pregnancy. One morning, she fell striking her head. She died August 11, 1951, from a blood clot on the brain.

In 1952, while attending church, William met his future wife, Sylvia Marie Halsey Ray. Sylvia was born April 23, 1915, to Isaac Halsey (November 28, 1879 to April 22, 1953) and Etta Taylor (March 12, 1881 to August 20, 1945). Widowed on November 6, 1939, her husband, Robert Bruce Ray was killed in an Otsego mine explosion. She was left with three daughters.

After a short courtship, William and Sylvia were married on November 18, 1952, by Reverend Freddie Steele at Oak Hill, Fayette County, West Virginia. They had one child.

After their marriage, Sylvia left her home in Measle Creek moving to William's home at White Oak. During the summer of 1954, they moved back to the farm Sylvia's family had inherited upon her father's death. The 178 acre farm at Measle Creek was located in Wyoming County, across the road from the old Maben coal tipple. Settled by Isaac Halsey around the turn of the century, the only flaw with the farm was it was leased land, owned by the Pocahontas Land Company.

Shortly afterwards, William became a vacuum cleaner salesman to supplement his church income. This type of work required a lot of time on the road, which didn't set well with his new bride, so he resigned after a short time. In 1964, he welcomed the good news he was receiving his Social Security pension. The ten-year period following their move to Measle Creek saw all the children except two become of age and move away. On August 7, 1966, tragedy struck the family once again when his son Curtis, age 24, was killed in a car accident outside of Oceana.

In the fall of 1967, William received bad news once again. After living in Measle Creek for 13 years their lease was not renewed, as a result of public outcry over pollution caused by the old Maben slat dump. Fire from the dump caused a heavy blanket of fog to cover the valley from time to time. The Westmoreland Coal Company was forced to cover the old dump with dirt and abandon it. Measle Creek provided a perfect location for a new dump. After negotiations between coal and land companies, Westmoreland had a 99-year lease on all the property in Measle Creek.

William and his family packed and moved on April 2, 1968, to a house they bought in Otsego, a small coal camp one mile north of Mullens. It was a stressful and unexpected move for them. Leaving her childhood home was a great emotional strain on Sylvia. William was faced with the financial burden of paying for a house and moving expenses. He found a job as a night watchman at a local mine, but he resigned a few years later. His Christian convictions would no longer permit him to carry a gun. In 1971, at age 69, he received his long awaited Black Lung benefits.

William had eye problems at an early age, but neglected going to the doctor. When he did seek help, his eye sight was beyond repair. By 1973, it was no longer safe for him to drive after dark. Unable to study as he once did, he retired as a full-time pastor in the Church of God. After 30 years, his full time preaching ministry ended. The same year he entered Saint Lukas Hospital in Bluefield for cataract surgery, which

proved to be too little too late. William drove sparingly until 1988 when he forfeited his driver's license and sold his car.

After William retired from the coal mines, his lungs improved. He remained in good health until 1985 when he had prostate gland surgery. He developed stomach problems and a hearing loss in his later years. In general, his health remained good until October 1992, when he suffered a series of mini-strokes. After this he had to be put in a nursing home where he spent the last 2 ½ years of his life. He passed away on May 28, 1995, at the age of 92. He was buried in the George Snuffer Cemetery at Bolt, Raleigh County. His great-grandfather, George "Dickey" Snuffer started the cemetery in 1881. Sylvia stayed at their home in Otsego and remained in reasonably good health until April 2000, when she was diagnosed with colon cancer. She passed away on October 18, 2000, at the age of 85. These were the life and times of William Sherman Snuffer.