

## CHAPTER ONE

Now that I have time to sit and think, I am amazed that I can remember so clearly things that happened almost 90 years ago. And it gave me an idea that my children, my grandchildren, and perhaps my great-grandchildren might be interested in their ancestors and the way they lived.

I will first give a little description of Mt. Airy, North Carolina, our birthplace. My mother, my husband Dixie's mother, Dixie and myself, and later, all six of our children were born there, and we were proud of it. In fact, Mt. Airy people were kind of clannish; people seemed to think they did not want to mix too much with outsiders. They married and intermarried in Mt. Airy, and it was said if you should go to Mt. Airy, do not say anything disrespectful of anyone, for you will be speaking of someones kin or connection.

Mt. Airy is situated just 10 miles from the foot of the Blue Ridge mountains on the Fancy Gap road which is one of the prettiest gaps in the

Blue Ridges. It is just five miles from the foot to the top of the mountain and when you reach the top you are in Virginia. But back to Mt. Airy. It was then considered a very historical, although small town. In the first place, it was supposed to be built on a solid rock covering many acres, but the rock was not exposed in town. About one mile from town there were 80 acres of just solid rock which was exposed, and this once belonged to Uncle Robert Gilmer. It decreased the value of his farm so much that he sold the farm, including the flat rock, as it was called, for \$100. A little later a company bought it and started quarrying granite which soon became famous for its beauty, and before long they were shipping it all over the U.S. and even to London.

Another feature, the White Sulphur Springs, four miles from Mt. Airy had the sulphur you could smell at times for miles. It was later developed and made into one of the outstanding summer resorts in the state.

Then, we had the original Siamese Twins, who married while in their twenties and settled near Mt. Airy. They built homes -- one about four miles and the other eight miles from town, and raised families. One had nine children, the other

eight. They still went on trips and would take a child from each family. They became worth quite a bit, educated the children who married, mostly in very good country families. I was quite young when they died, but I still remember the excitement when one found that the other had died during the night. Before they could get a doctor out from town, the one who was still living died from fright and shock. They were never separated.

I still think Mt. Airy outstanding. I had a friend, a Mrs. Franklin who came out to Oklahoma about the time I did. Her husband and my daughter Rebecca's husband, Howard, loved to get us in a crowd and express themselves as not being able to see anything unusual about Mt. Airy at all, just to hear us get started on the subject.

So much for Mt. Airy. But I hope if you have an opportunity, any or all of you will make a trip there sometime.

## CHAPTER TWO

I will begin with my own life as far back as I can remember, and hope it will not be too uninteresting. The first thing I seem to remember was when my grandfather, Elisha Banner, was sick and passed away. I help my memory by referring to deaths and some dates I have. I was just two years old and I remember distinctly sitting in a mountain rocker by his bed. He was my mother's father, and certainly a character. He owned a bunch of slaves and seemed to be quite well-to-do. His first wife, Mary Eliza - my grandmother - had died earlier. They had five children, one of whom was my mother, Rebecca Banner. Grandfather then married a wealthy woman from Virginia who had four children. They then had five. Some family! And so far as I know they got along together. Her four were married early and so were Grandfather's, except the youngest boy who ran away. He got with a family moving to Texas and later married their daughter. He settled in Ennis,

Texas, and recently I have visited them there. They had a beautiful home there and a real talented family of three. He died just a few years ago.

My step-grandmother also came out to Texas later with her five children and located in Manor, Texas. They never went back to North Carolina except the oldest son who had been going with Dixie's older sister. He later went back and married the sister, Mary Belle Gilmer. Figure out, if you can, what relation their children are to ours. I have never been able to. Mamie Gant is one of them.

I don't know where my Grandfather Prather was born, but he was Thomas Franklin Prather and married Charity Briggs in Stokes Co., N.C., and they lived in Danbury for some time and then moved to Mt. Airy. They had eight children, four boys and four girls. My father, Thomas William Prather was their oldest son. Grandfather Prather was a jolly old fellow. He was a merchant and sold goods mainly to the mountain people. They said of him that he always made a sale, for if he could not get one price he would take another. He loved his toddy or nightcap, as you would call it, and was known far and near.

But my Grandmother Prather was my ideal. I loved to visit with them, and to this day I have never eaten food like I had there. I still am particularly fond of corn which was Grandfather's specialty. He had a patch planted every month until frost; then he pulled the stalks up by the roots, dug holes in the smoke-house and buried the roots, and they would have corn until Christmas. He did apples the same way, and at Christmas they were both delightful. Of course they had never then had any canned. They usually had it cooked three ways. He liked corn soup just scraped out of the ears and cooked with plenty of fresh butter and cream. Some liked it boiled and others fried. Chicken was cooked the same three ways.

Of course, Grandmother Prather had help, but she managed the cooking. I just could hardly wait for the meal.

Grandfather would say, "Charity, you are just spoiling your children with their eating."

She would say, "Well, I always have to fix your food a certain way, too, don't I?"

My grandmother was a source of information and entertainment to me. She was, as she said, never well. She had what she called dyspepsia -

never really in bed, but after meals she would start taking her medicine. She rarely ever had a doctor, but she would take soda water, and she would carry, usually in her pocket, rhubarb root, gentian, arrowroot and various other things I can't remember.

She still molded her own candles when most people had stopped. She would let me pour the tallow into the moulds. Then we would make tapers out of colored paper, if we could get it, to light the candles and lamps. That was soon after the Civil War. In fact, I was born on December 5 in 1864, the year before the surrender. Matches were hard to get then and were kept in fancy vases.

In cold weather we would sit by the log fire when other people were out - Grandfather in one corner, Grandmother in the other, and myself in the middle - and pop corn or roast chestnuts. Then she would begin telling me stories of the war and things she read in the paper and what she did when she was a girl. I was the oldest grandchild, and none of the others would care to listen to her. You might misjudge her from my description, but she was really intelligent and read a great deal. In fact, she subscribed for

the Cincinnati Inquirer soon after she was married, and it was the only newspaper that came to that town. After reading it thoroughly she would loan it to all the neighbors. She had that paper sent to her as long as she lived.

She seemed to visit very little, but she always went to church. She wore a black silk full skirt, an apron, and a bonnet. Her children once bought her a hat and she wore it once and was so ashamed of herself she told me later that she never had a hat on again.

The Briggs were a very religious people, and while my grandmother read a great deal, she did not seem to want to keep up with the times. Her youngest son in the end took the best of care of her and let her do just what she wanted to. She had a little colored girl whom she took with her wherever she went. People would say, "There comes Mrs. Prather and Martha." She lived to be 85. Grandfather Prather died at 81.

### CHAPTER THREE

My father and mother, Tom Prather and Rebecca Banner, were married in Mt. Airy in 1859 in Grandfather Banner's home. She, along with Dixie's mother and some other girls from Mt. Airy had just gotten back from Salem Female Academy. That was before the Civil War and the southern people had some money then. She was said to be very pretty and I imagine attractive.

A short time after they were married he had built a brick house, said to be the first brick one in Mt. Airy. My first memories are centered around that place. When I went back there in the 1930's it still looked almost the same, only it had been renovated and added to several times. It was certainly built more substantially than they build them now.

I was about eight years old when my family moved to Tennessee. My father had, like some others after the war, made quite a bit of money out of the tobacco business, and money and jobs

were still hard to get. The effects of the war were still felt by most people.

My father, who was the oldest of the boys in his family, had graduated from Wake Forest College in North Carolina before the war. The others did not all have the opportunity to go to college. Well, he took his family and his three brothers, also a young man, Henry Bray, who was the town comedian, and moved to a small town called Zolacoffer, just ten miles from Bristol, Tennessee, where he had a cotton factory built on the Holston River. He seemed to be making money right along and certainly having a good time. They practically had a concert every night. Music was and is a hobby with all Prathers; they love it. They each one had a musical instrument. My mother played the accompaniment and this Henry Bray furnished the comedy. I was having a wonderful time myself.

In the meantime my father had built a tobacco factory and a regular little town for the employees. Things seemed to me to be going fine.

Sullins College for young ladies had recently been established and Dr. Sullins and my father had gotten to be great friends. They would talk and joke by the hour. I can even remember some

of the jokes. Dr. Sullins was a Methodist preacher and my father was a Methodist. He was out advertising his school and it was not long until I was sent to Sullins College. I roomed with his daughter, Annie Sullins, which gave me quite some prestige. I was specializing in music, and those were some of the outstanding years in my early life.

I went home one week-end and heard my father had gone into business with a Mrs. Stover, or rather, that she had bought an interest in the factory. Mrs. Stover was President Andrew Johnson's daughter, and had been mistress at the White House, her mother being dead when he was President. She built a home they called a mansion, this being a small town with practically no buildings of any size.

Summer came and we were invited to spend a month on her farm. My mother had a new baby, a little boy born in Tennessee. He was named Thomas William Prather, Jr. He died soon after I was married. So my mother, my sister, the baby and I went out, Father coming on the week-ends. It was the most elegant farm I had ever seen. We passed the stables first and I thought it was the residence. They had just every kind of fruit and

foods of all kinds. I was completely carried away with everything. Just wished some of my college friends could have come along.

The next year I went back to school. My sister, Chattie, four years younger, went with me, and when I went home the first week-end the three brothers and Henry Bray had gone back to North Carolina. My father had set them each up in a little business back there. I wondered about it, but my parents were never very communicative with their affairs.

Things seemed quite different. Mrs. Stover's married daughter, Mrs. Maloney who lived in the old Andrew Johnson home in Knoxville, came quite frequently and when she was there she seemed to insist on my father spending the evening with them. She seemed to think him very interesting. Occasionally my mother went and when I was home he always had me go along.

Things went on in a way, and when I went back my third year I was informed that my father was moving back to Mt. Airy and that Chattie and I would stay until school was out, which we did and then went back to Mt. Airy. I found my father had failed in business, turned everything over to Mrs. Stover and, unlike some people he had not

reserved a lot of money, and his health had failed.

I was then 18. It seemed nice getting back to Mt. Airy with all the young people I had known grown up and many of them related to me. We had the old time parties and dances, and I soon found myself seeing William Franklin "Dixie" Gilmer quite a bit. He had gone into business, bought out a dry goods store and opened up with quite a few new features. He had also purchased a carriage and two bay horses.

One Sunday he met me in church and asked me to ride home in the carriage. He then asked me to go to a baptising out on the Arrarat River. Many people attended those baptisings in summer. So he came around in due time with a sack of cocoanut candy, and while we were out he asked me to marry him. I told him I was sure my folks would think me too young, which they did. And, too, we were having a good time, I thought. But Dixie insisted there was no object in waiting. He said he was ready to settle down and get married.

Well, we were married that autumn, on November 21, 1883, but it was quite a while before he settled down.

#### CHAPTER FOUR

And now begins life with father. I was 18 years old and Dixie was 21, and from a family of ten living children. Our families had known each other before we were born. As I have said before, Dixie and I were both born in Mt. Airy, also his mother, Matilda Caroline Moore, and all her ten children, my mother, and also all of Dixie's and my children were later born there. This was the beginning of a long and eventful life together, promised for better or worse, and we had plenty of both which we shared together until he was 81. He had lived a full life and was ready to go.

I may find I have described him to you several times, but he really was a remarkable person. They don't make them any better-hearted, but he also really liked publicity and taking the lead in things. You will understand later what I mean.

Dixie was determined we would have a church wedding, something Mt. Airy had not yet had. I

made me a white satin dress. My aunt from Winston (Uncle Frank Prather's wife who was a music teacher in the Old Salem Academy) came up and helped me out.

We started our journey with the trip down to the Methodist church in the carriage with the two bay horses. We had little flower girls and all, and the wedding went off fine. The next day, the infare (you call it reception, now) was at his father's, which was customary. We had an array of bridal presents, but Dixie was so afraid we would not have many he had bought some silver and things and put different names of his family on it.

Everything was starting off fine. We went to live with his family, and here I will have to describe them to you in order for you to understand my position. I had been raised in a family of four children, one of whom died early in life. My father was the head of our family. He was quite even-tempered, and I was, as they say, crazy about him. He taught us to dance, to play many games, but when he said you should do something it was immediately taken care of; no discussion whatever. If he said be home by nine o'clock it would not be 9:15.

So this family of ten Gilmers (only two girls

were married - the others were at home) was a revelation to me. It seemed to me that everyone did as they pleased. Everybody was allowed to express themselves freely, even the younger ones. But I soon learned that Mother Gilmer was distinctly the head of that family. Father Gilmer, (Samuel L. Gilmer was his full name,) was easy-going and did not seem to interfere with anyone. I loved him. In later years he sat on the front porch all summer, often reading either the Congressional Record with which his son kept him supplied, or the Bible. And like most men of that generation he liked his toddy occasionally.

The Gilmer family were different from mine in many ways. They were well-known all over the state, all politically inclined, quite a few holding and having held important offices as judges, members of Congress and so on. And Dixie's brother was later attorney-general of North Carolina for two consecutive terms. Also, on his mother's side (the Moores) there were several outstanding members of the family. One uncle was brought home after the Revolutionary War and buried in Guilford Memorial Park. I could write a good deal of the family history, but perhaps it would not interest this generation.

We lived with the family for a short time, and then Dixie had a house built on a lot back of his father's - a nice little two-story house. They immediately opened up the street and called it Dixie Street. It is now one of the nicest streets in Mt. Airy.

It was nice getting to housekeeping, and in ones own home. We were fixed up, we thought, real nicely. Dixie had bought me a piano and a sewing machine. What more could we wish?

The dry goods store which started out on such a large scale prospered for a while. But the combination money drawer seemed available to anybody who needed a little money, and it was but a short time until Dixie went broke. They closed him out. The carriage and horses were sold, and he had to make a fresh start.

At that time the White Sulphur Springs was just being opened up as a summer resort. A big new hotel and various amusements. So Dixie applied for clerk and was given the place, his first experience in the hotel business. That summer (our second together) we had a wonderful time. I had nothing to do but visit with the guests, and I was supposed to help entertain them. I was soon good at pool and billiards and

games of all kinds. Then the season was over, all too soon. And there was the matter of still eating confronting us.

Considering himself somewhat experienced, and finding the Blue Ridge Inn in Mt. Airy for rent, Dixie decided that would be a good proposition. So he rented it, and it being the only hotel there, did a very good business. I ordered a lot of cookbooks (French names and all) and with this colored woman, Etta, who always came to my rescue, at the head of the cooking, we figured we were a success. Then, after about a year, one windy, cold night fire broke out in our block - the main business street in town. It reached our place before we could get out anything. All our possessions - our clothes, my homemade spreads, tatting and crocheting, bridal presents and all - were stored on the second floor, and all burned up. There being no fire department at that time, the whole block burned.

So that left us to start all over again. Now that our things were burned up mostly and we had not made very many payments on our house, we had to just let it go, too. The only thing we saved was the piano. It was stored elsewhere.

## CHAPTER FIVE

There was then the matter of getting a job. We had decided that it might be better to get away from Mt. Airy for a time. So Dixie left in search of something. He went to Charlotte, which was the biggest, and still is the largest and most progressive town in the state. He was fortunate in getting a place as clerk with Wittcosky and Baruch, the largest dry goods store there.

Living in Charlotte was quite different from Mt. Airy. Dixie had the nerve to introduce himself to the banker who had married a Gilmer. He also introduced himself to Judge Gilmer, and the name carried weight all right. We were invited to join the Presbyterian church, which we did, and when this banker's son, Gilmer Brenizer was being married, we were invited to the big state wedding.

They had a dressmaker at this store, so I had me a dress made for the occasion. They had a long table which seemed to cover a large part of the

house. Guests were there from all over the state. I was really nervous, but we sat next to a nice couple and I did not risk taking anything until they did. They served the first olives I had ever seen, but I made an effort to eat them. They served dishes I had never seen, but I managed to eat what was supposed to be eaten. Then, I had never seen finger bowls used, but I soon found out what they were for. After dinner they danced for a little while - only the lancers and waltz. I had been taught young to dance, so I could really waltz. And that was our first real society affair.

We went to the big new Opera House for every good show. And finally the Opera was advertised, and I went to my first grand opera, "The Mikado." I was so impressed I decided we would save up and make every one that came.

We were delighted with Charlotte. But Dixie was making just a small salary, and we found it hard to make ends meet, living like we wanted to. So about that time Robert Gilmer, Dixie's brother, had decided to run for attorney-general. He had married a society girl whose father had the money. They were living in Asheville. He made the race (and won, by the way, and was re-elected for

a second term.) Dixie immediately persuaded his brother to let him campaign for him, and after making a few speeches, they said he made a better speech than his brother. The only thing, he did not have the education. Sometimes, I guess, he would make a grammatical error, but, as they said, he really had the gift of gab.

After the election was over, he immediately asked for some kind of position, and got the place as postal clerk on the Southern Railway Co. His run was from Washington to Atlanta. We decided that he could take his lay-off in Greensboro more conveniently. So we moved to Greensboro and secured rooms in a private home with the McLeans, a lovely family. Later, when our first baby came, she was named for Mrs. McLean.

They were wonderful to us. Mr. McLean was a deacon in the First Presbyterian Church and belonged to the choir. He asked me to join the choir and I was delighted to do so. I had played the organ for our church at home. And like most young people, I felt that I had a fairly good alto voice.

Dixie came in every other day. We played whist often at night with the McLeans and their friends, and we both liked Greensboro. It was

about 60 miles from Mt. Airy and we knew quite a few people there.

We had been there about a year and a half when the railroad from Mt. Airy to Bennettsville, South Carolina was finished, and they put Dixie on the run between those two towns. We then moved back to Mt. Airy, and I was glad then to get back, for we were expecting a new arrival, and I wanted to get back to be near my mother.

I don't want to leave the impression that we were doing nothing through those years but having a good time. Although we did get around and do things, don't think I ever wasted any time. I was always doing some kind of hand work. From the time I was six years old, I was made to knit, sew and embroider. I had to spend an hour at it every day. My mother had me make a quilt a year, starting when I was eight years old. So I didn't spend all the time having a good time. I made all my clothes and dresses, too, - all I had after I was married for a long time. I loved to sew and do things, and still do at 90. And I can still see to crochet little things for the children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Of course, from the time I was married I had the idea of raising a big family. I have always

been particularly fond of children and still am foolish about my great-grandchildren. But when I was first married everything was so different I guess I was kind of carried away at first. After five years of being married without any children, though, I was more than ready to settle down and try to raise them. It was an operation that enabled me to have children, and that was the one thing I wanted so much to do.

Well, after we moved back to Mt. Airy, Ella Glenn arrived on the scene - our first baby, and a little girl. We were delighted and thought her a beauty.

## CHAPTER SIX

Dixie's term as railroad postal clerk had expired. In the meantime he conceived the idea of chartering a train and running an excursion from Mt. Airy to Wilmington, North Carolina, down on the seacoast. Most of the people who lived up in the mountains had never seen a train until the railroad line into Mt. Airy was completed, much less ridden on one. So Dixie chartered a train with so many coaches to be run down to Wilmington. He would pay so much for the trip, then any amount above that made from the sale of tickets would be his - if there should be any.

Well, the day came, and by daylight the mountain people were coming into town. They left Mt. Airy with a good crowd, and more kept getting on at every little station. By the time they got to Greensboro, they put on some extra coaches which were soon filled. Before they got half way they tried to get some more extra cars with no success. But it was so dreadfully crowded that

they put on a cattle car to keep from having a stampede.

When they got to Wilmington, they said it was a show to see the crowd get off that train. They ran a boat a few miles out on the ocean, but few had nerve enough for that. When Dixie managed to get the crowd back on the train, got them home, and settled up with the railroad company, he had just bags of money left - silver, gold, greenbacks.

We started building an eight-room house on Pine Street, and Dixie thought another excursion would be a good deal, so he advertised and ran another. It did not do so well, though it more than paid for itself. But he was persuaded that it would not be advisable to try it again.

He had decided to invest his money and possibly make a fortune. So he and a man named Joe Fulton decided to go to New York and go into the cotton business. Joe had made quite a bit in that business. Well, they went to New York, rented a place and started out. They did fine and I was getting the most encouraging letters - money was coming in fast. We were now looking for another addition to our family, so this was good news.

Then Marie arrived. Two little girls - what

could be nicer? My mother was with me when both the little girls came, but she passed away soon after this at the age of 52. My father lived four years longer and died at the age of 58. He lived though to see the next two children, Thomas and Rebecca. Mother Gilmer then really took their place. She was right with me when anything came up, always ready to drop anything and come any time, now that none of my immediate family were there any more.

Dixie stayed in New York for about six months. They had invested heavily in cotton, but cotton went down and down. And they came home without any money. In the meantime, Marie had arrived. We still had a nice home left and two wonderful little girls. But I was ready to settle down.

Dixie got a place as traveling salesman with M.L.T. Davis Flour Mill in Weatherford. He could come in home for week-ends. He would try that until he could do better. They paid \$100 a month and expenses, which was a fair salary, but he did not stay with them long. He was looking for something better than that.

The fish season was on just then, so he had the fish business in mind. He would go to Wil-

mington, and ship fresh fish and seafoods to different places. He went to Wilmington, went in with some man there, and shipped fish and oysters. We then rented part of our new house and went with the two little girls to Wilmington. It was nice for a while. We took a cottage at Virginia Beach for a month in summer. But we were both homesick and after staying a year and a half, we went back home to Mt. Airy.

Dixie had been shipping some fish to a little produce house there, so he thought up an idea to take it over and go into the produce business. Mt. Airy is on the Fancy Gap Road, 10 miles from the foot of the Blue Ridge, and really the produce that comes from the mountain is a little better than from anywhere else. Apples are larger and have better flavor; berries are as large as cultivated berries. Well, he took over the produce house and soon the word got around that he was buying on a large scale. So they came from the mountain with wagonloads of just everything. Chestnuts when in season seemed to be the most profitable. Then chickens, eggs, butter and cabbage. I remember particularly wagonloads of cabbages, big as tubs, it seems to me. It got to be a big business. Incidentally, you could buy a big

fat hen for 25 cents, a rooster for 15 cents, butter 10 cents a pound.

One day an acquaintance of Dixie's who had just come from Cuba was talking to him. He said the price of food there was much higher than ours. Immediately the idea came to Dixie: why not ship produce to Cuba? He was sold on the idea and immediately went to work getting a carload ready to ship. He had gotten in communication with a dealer in Cuba, but would go along to see what the prospect would be for a permanent deal.

He did very well with it, and had a wonderful trip, too. I was sure of that, for in about a month he received a barrel of wine from one of the Cubans. It had been sent directly from Spain.

"What in the world do you expect to do with that big barrel of wine?" I asked him. "And where are you going to put it?"

He proceeded to put it in the basement, and the first thing he did was to send an amount to all the churches far and near. (It was unfermented.) I don't remember what went with the last of the wine. I think the barrel and all was there when we left.

But that was not the last of the Cuban trip. To my amazement, Dixie came in a few days after

his return with some posters which read, "What I Saw and Heard in Cuba." He said he had rented the Opera House, and was going to give a talk, charging 15 cents for tickets.

"How could you do such a thing?" I said, "You will be the laughing stock of Mt. Airy. What could there be to say about Cuba that people do not know?"

"You just wait and see," he said.

I said, "I will wait, but I won't see."

However, I intended to hear what he had to say, so I went in late and sat near the door. Well, the Opera House was crowded to capacity. Everyone said it was a scream. They just cheered and cheered. The last time I saw Dixie's brother, Bernie, we were laughing about that speech.

But back to the Cuban deal. Next Dixie decided he would ship a carload of eggs and dressed hens. He scoured the country to get eggs enough for a carload. But something happened to that carload. It was delayed some way, and by the time it reached Cuba the eggs and chickens had been too long on the road. He lost a big part of them, and a lot of money. So that big deal for getting rich was off, too.

But in the meantime, an idea came to him.

Since he had such good luck with the speech he made, why not make a deal with a stock company to come for a week, as they had never had anything of the kind in Mt. Airy. Well, he immediately got in touch with some company—Ellen Minkley was the leading lady. He rented the Opera House and put on his show. They stayed one week and had a full house every night. The next company he booked did not do so well. They were nothing extra, and the novelty had worn off.

In the meantime, we had been expecting another member to our family. Most likely another girl... so when the time came and we found we had a boy, we were really delighted. We named him Thomas Prather Gilmer for my father.

I now felt that something must be done about this thing of big deals making money so easy, then having it invested right away in getting another start. I must devise some way to put something where it would be saved. We were agreed that our children must have good educations regardless of anything else.

Dixie had kept someone at the produce house right along, selling enough to keep up his expenses. Now he turned his attention to the shipping of produce — but not to Cuba. He started shipping

all kinds of produce, and he centered on Washington, D.C. Chestnuts was a money maker, but it lasted only a short time. However, those mountain apples, berries, and poultry were no trouble to get rid of.

We were seemingly getting started again. I was busy with my housekeeping. We had a cook always, but I made all the children's clothes, my own dresses and all Dixie's shirts. I thought we were settled and happy. We had joined the little Presbyterian Church, both taking an active part, and the three children were in Sunday School. Dixie started teaching Sunday School and soon had a large class of boys. I played the organ for Sunday School and sometimes for church. We had a young minister and he lived with us for a while. Everything was going fine. Maybe we were settled for good.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

We went along that way for several years, shipping now almost entirely to Washington, D.C. I could see, however, that Dixie was getting kind of restless.

One day he said, "I am going to Washington to see about this business. I think the men up there are making too much profit. I'll be gone several days."

When he got back he said, "I have a surprise for you. I rented a place on Louisiana Avenue, and I'm going to let my man here still buy produce and ship it to me there. We can move to Washington. Don't you think that will be a grand place to raise the children?"

"No, I don't," I said, "and furthermore, I can't go. I'm expecting another baby, you know."

I had made up my mind that no matter how many children we should have, they were to be born in Mt. Airy. My father was sick, then, too. But Dixie had made all the arrangements to go right away,

so I told him he could just go on without me this time, and we would see how things worked out later.

My father was taken worse. His house had recently burned down, and he and my young brother, Phinnie, were kind of batching. So I had him brought to our house.

Dixie had been gone about two months when our fourth baby was born, and this time it was a nice little girl. We named her Rebecca, after my mother. My father died about two weeks after she was born.

Dixie had gotten well established in his business, so there was nothing left for me to do but pack up and move to Washington, for as he said, we were there permanently. Rebecca was only six weeks old. I packed up with the four children, and a colored woman I had with me promised to go for a while.

We walked into this place which he had secured temporarily, and when the lady took a look at us - three children, the woman and a crying baby, she looked absolutely stunned. I don't know what Dixie had told her, but I am sure she was thinking how in the world did I get into this. What a predicament he had gotten us into! Three healthy children having been accustomed to getting around

## CHAPTER EIGHT

The way things turned out, I was glad to get Dixie back to our old Doctor Hollingsworth. It took him a little while to get his strength and energy back, and he turned his interest in the produce business over to the man who had been working for him. He was, incidentally, through with the produce business for good.

By now we had managed to deplete the little savings account considerably again. Dixie was feeling almost himself again, and he must look around and get something to do pretty quick, for although groceries were cheap then, there was now no produce house where we could pick them up for nothing.

It so happened that the old Blue Ridge Inn had been closed up and completely renovated and enlarged, and was for rent. We rented it again. Of course, Mt. Airy had built up considerably since we had run it before, but it was still the only hotel of any importance in Mt. Airy. It was nice and new, and Dixie liked it fine. We did a good

business. I had a big room in back for the children to play and have their company. And I had a large sewing room and kept a woman most of the time sewing.

It was all right except for the children. I knew I was going to keep my children there only until something else showed up as I felt sure it would. And, too, we were expecting another baby, and thought it best to stay there for the arrival.

So this time it was another boy, and we were both as delighted as we were with the first. Two boys and three girls was certainly nice. And this would probably be the last. We named him Dixie, for his father.

We stayed on for a short time and then Edgar Gilmer, Dixie's younger brother, decided he wanted to go into the hotel business, although he had had no experience. He suggested that Dixie go in with him and that they rent the McAdoo hotel in Greensboro, which had been repaired and would be rented. It was one of the largest and considered the best in Greensboro. So Dixie thought with his experience they would have a nice thing of it.

We gave up the Blue Ridge Inn and the two brothers with his family, his wife and two little girls, went to Greensboro. They opened up the

McAdoo. It was already established and right in the center of town. No trouble to keep it filled and with the best class of people.

I was still in Mt. Airy. The house was still rented, so I stayed with Dixie's sister, Mary Belle, until I got ready to leave. My reason for not going on sooner was that we were really expecting our sixth baby. I wanted it to be born in Mt. Airy, and with Etta, the same colored woman who was with me when the other five came. By the way, Etta's mother was cooking for my mother when the Civil War ended. Etta was a year older than I, and had been kept in the house to look after and stay with me. She was now married and had two children. But whenever I came home and there was to be a new baby, she always dropped everything and stayed until I was able to take care of my baby.

So when I was able to go on to Greensboro, our sixth baby, a little girl we named Emily, was just four weeks old. And Etta went with me.

We rented an apartment near the hotel and had some of our meals there. After I was stronger, it was very nice and we liked Greensboro. A number of our old friends were so nice to us, and Dixie's two brothers and a sister were married and now

lived there.

It was soon evident that Dixie and his brother, Edgar, were not going to get along, for Dixie just would not charge his friends and relatives when they came to the hotel. His brother was the opposite; he was practical and careful and systematic. Dixie did not really like things too systematic. At first, however, they seemed to be getting along, doing a good business.

We had been there just about a year when the Barnum and Bailey Circus was advertised to be in Greensboro on a Saturday. Well, we had a big crowd for dinner that evening and some spent the night. I mean the friends and relatives.

I had stopped in for dinner, and Edgar came up to me, "Do you want to know how many dead-heads we fed this evening?" he said, "Thirty-six. And when the dinner was announced they rushed in, and with a bunch of other mountain people just crowded out our regular guests."

It was just too much for him. So the two brothers agreed to one or the other buy out the place. They both started out looking to see what they could find.

They had a brother-in-law, the oldest sister's husband, Bob Joyce - who had just gotten back from

a trip out west selling furniture. He had done some business in Oklahoma, and he was really impressed with everything.

"If I were as young as either of you two," he said, "and knew anything about the hotel business, I would certainly go out to Oklahoma. You could make a fortune if you were out there now."

"Not I," Edgar said, "North Carolina is good enough for me."

Dixie did not say much, but he was doing a lot of thinking.

## CHAPTER NINE

The next day Dixie came in and said to me, "Let's go out to Oklahoma. Let's just get away from everything and start anew. I can't save anything here."

"No, Dixie, you can't," I said. "And I hate to say it, but you can't save any money anywhere. You have gotten rid of enough to really be independent now. I shouldn't complain, I guess. I admit we have always, so far, had anything we needed and most things we wanted. But I have been talked into following you around for eighteen years. And this is just too much for you to even ask me to start out to Oklahoma with six children, knowing no one at all, and have them grow up among those Indians. No, I can't do that."

But as usual, he finally talked me into going with him, out to Oklahoma.

We notified his family. I had none, except one married sister, Mrs. Stack, who was living in Monroe, Virginia and had six children, and my young

brother, Phinnie.

The Gilmers were simply amazed. Dixie's mother proceeded to give him a piece of her mind for, as she said, dragging his family out to a place like that. They said so much about how the children would grow up and all that, like most wives, I started taking his views. I had been reading quite a bit on the subject, and we both knew Oklahoma was a coming state, and maybe after all it would be better for the children as they grew up. Our only object was to get settled and fixed to give our children the advantage of the very best education, and a permanent home.

We started immediately getting ready to go out to Oklahoma. It was just a short time, then, until we had disposed of everything we had except what we would take with us. Dixie went on out about two months ahead. He stopped in Oklahoma City, but went straight on to Ardmore, where his brother-in-law had said it looked promising for an investment, there being only one hotel of any size, the Whittington.

Dixie secured a very good building right on Main Street, and invested what money we had, and fixed it up. He opened up the Gilmer Hotel, and was ready for us.

We did not leave in a covered wagon as so many seem proud to say they did. But we made quite a party as we boarded the train - the oldest, Ella Glenn, was thirteen; Marie, eleven; Thomas, nine; Rebecca, five; Dixie, Jr., two; and Emily, one year.

Dixie's youngest brother, Bernie, was a telegraph operator, and he asked the conductor to please see that none were missing when we arrived in Oklahoma. Mrs. Kennette, the sister whose home we were leaving from, said, "Don't try to get off anywhere to eat. Some of them might get left." She fixed up what looked like a half-bushel basket of food, and we boarded the train.

I soon found we were affording quite a bit of amusement for the passengers near us. Although Ella Glenn and Marie were older, Thomas appointed himself Captain, which position he still holds in the family. He got a map and a pencil, and every town we passed he marked, and in a loud tone he kept us posted as to the next stop and just how far it was from Oklahoma. They talked about Indians and cyclones, and soon they were the center of attraction, for at that time most people back east thought Oklahoma a wild place to live.

Emily, in the meantime, was getting her share

of attention, for she was having trouble with her milk. So was Dixie, Jr. - there was just one year between them. Rebecca was not old enough nor young enough to be paid much attention.

The fried chicken and the food certainly tasted good the first day, but the second day it was not so good. However, I did not take much risk in letting any of them get out.

We were two days and two nights getting to Ardmore. We did not have to change cars until we got to Haileyville, Oklahoma. It was pouring down rain when we got in there - about three o'clock in the morning. It was really terrible. The depot was closed up and we could just take a bus and go to the hotel and stay until a train left next morning for Ardmore.

We managed to get a room with two beds. Even if we could have gotten another it was at the end of the hall. So we went to bed, the three girls in one bed, and I had the two babies in the other, I don't remember if Thomas was at my feet or on a pallet on the floor. Anyway, none of them could go to sleep. Everyone was too excited, and Emily was crying. But we got through the night, and next morning I let the girls and Thomas go down to breakfast, and I had ours sent up. We really en-

joyed a good, hot breakfast.

We took the train and got into Ardmore about two o'clock that afternoon. Dixie was there waiting for us, and I leave you to imagine how glad we were to see him.

## CHAPTER TEN

Ardmore did not look so good, but the hotel was all right in a way. It had an apartment kind of cut off. I could go into detail, but it would not be of interest. Suffice it to say I was awfully homesick already. Why did I consent to come, I wondered.

This was just before statehood and part of Oklahoma was still called Indian Territory then. Ardmore was in Indian Territory. The streets, even Main Street, were not paved. But we started out with the hotel doing very well. We had to have mostly white help.

Dixie was well pleased with everything. And I want to tell you why everyone started calling him Mr. Gilmer. It was because I started calling him that about this time. He had never been known by anything but Dixie. But when I found we had all kinds of help, I was determined they should be more respectful to him. So I began calling him Mr. Gilmer, and everyone followed suit.

He had gotten a letter from the governor of North Carolina, also a dozen or so letters from other state officials. So he immediately fell in with the best people there and was really well-pleased with everything. We were near the Presbyterian church and started the four older children in to Sunday School the first Sunday we were there.

Mr. Gilmer was soon acquainted with everyone around, but I was not interested in getting acquainted, for I saw in the beginning that I was going to have plenty to do if we were to make a success of this. Then, too, I was more concerned in getting the children started. Also, I think I was a little sorry for myself.

We got the four children started in to school right away. We found that the principal of the school, Dr. Evans, was one of the leading educators in the state. He was still there when Thomas graduated from high school in 1910.

When statehood was declared in 1907, things really got busy everywhere. The Indians started rushing in to Ardmore to get their allotments settled. Our place was crowded. But it was hard to get good help. We had not been accustomed to white girls waiting on the table. We were crowded all the time, but our place was small. So, here again,

Mr. Gilmer was going to try something bigger.

Someone had just built a new hotel in Durant, Oklahoma, the first real hotel they had ever had there of any size. So he drew his money out of the bank and bought the Atwood Hotel. He went to Kansas City, bought furniture and furnished it. And we proceeded to move to Durant. The children were awfully disappointed. They hated to leave Ardmore and their friends. They had gotten to like it. Ardmore was getting to be quite a town now, too. The streets had been paved and it was growing rapidly.

This hotel in Durant was real nice, though, and things, it seemed, should have gone off fine. But the help proposition loomed up here worse than ever. We found Negroes were not allowed to enter the town. What help we could get was inexperienced. It was just too much for me. My strength gave out and I had a nervous breakdown. I was carried to Sherman, Texas for treatment.

We had put Ella Glenn and Marie in the Liberty Ladies' College in Liberty, Missouri. They were due home now very soon. I often wonder how I got through that period. I felt I just could not leave little Dixie and Emily there just with the girls. Mr. Gilmer was trying to work out something. He

had an old cousin who had come out to Texas. Cousin Sarah was 70 years old, but would be someone to trust the children with, and she finally stayed with us for quite a while. Mr. Gilmer ran the hotel then for just a short time. With poor help and me sick, he had lost quite a lot of money. Too, he and all of them wanted to go back to Ardmore.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

So Mr. Gilmer sold the hotel and we went back to Ardmore. We bought a home but did not live there very long. I was still in a wheel chair, but was beginning to get back my strength. Mr. Gilmer got the hotel back - the Gilmer, it was still called. I thought then of an idea. My young brother, Phinnie, was in Asheville, North Carolina, with the Swanannoah Hotel. I wrote him and insisted on him coming out here with us. He decided to do so and came on out immediately and, by the way, is still with us and still not married. He is 16 years younger than myself, in fact, nearer Ella Glenn's age than mine. He had been very fond of the children back in North Carolina. Well, it worked out fine. He went out with the girls and he really kept a strict watch on them. He belonged to the Methodist Church and joined the choir there immediately. Like all Prathers, he is particularly fond of music. Some years later he lived in Cushing and was director of the choir there for quite

a while. He is now 74 years old and still singing in the Methodist choir in Oklahoma City.

Ella Glenn was now 18 years old and was going with the boys, and one day she said, "I am going to marry Charlie Dobbins." She said he was fixing to ask her father that night.

They were married soon after. The hotel had an immense big reception room at the head of the stairs, and it made a wonderful place for a wedding after it was decorated. She had every one of her family in the wedding. Phinnie, Marie and Thomas were attendants. Emily and Dixie opened the gates. Rebecca was ring bearer. It was quite an affair.

Soon after that Marie informed us that she was getting married too. She was too young to think of marrying yet, but she seemed determined. The boy, Tom Bogie, was the son of the principal doctor in Ardmore, and he and Charlie Dobbins, the boy Ella Glenn married, were partners in an insurance business. They did not want any big wedding, so were just quietly married. But it was only a short time until Tom contracted a severe cold. It ended with his father saying he had tuberculosis. Tom's father, the doctor, took him to Santa Fe, New Mexico. Marie got ready and went out to them.

Tom seemed to be doing all right his father said, so Dr. Bogie came back. Marie and Tom stayed out there for about eight months and then, suddenly he had a relapse and died before anyone got there. Marie then lived with the Bogies for a short time.

We were still in the Gilmer Hotel. Lee Cruce was running for governor. Mr. Gilmer felt that he had been partly instrumental in persuading him to run. So he started out to campaign for him. My health was better now, so with Phinnie to help, the hotel went along fairly well. Thomas was graduating this year and they were having the Junior-Senior banquet in the reception hall. The whole junior and senior classes in the high school were working all week up there decorating and it was really beautiful. Thomas was very proud of it for it went off nicely.

Mr. Gilmer was fully determined now to get into politics. Cruce was elected and he was sure of a good place with him. So he sold out the hotel, and we moved to Oklahoma City. That was 1910.

The hotel business in Oklahoma was entirely different from North Carolina hotels, and this time we were both glad to give it up for good. It had not turned out like his brother-in-law had predicted by any means.

Well, we moved to Oklahoma City, but for some reason Mr. Gilmer did not get the place he was expecting.

I want to tell you a little more about Mr. Gilmer. He was, after all I suppose, a born politician. He was a member of the first state legislature when the state capitol was in Guthrie. He built the Old Soldiers' Home for Confederate veterans in Ardmore from donations collected from all over the state. He had campaigned for different candidates, and I believe he practically knew everybody of any importance in the state. He wanted to run for an office now himself. But you will already have understood that he was unable to ever have any extra money, and running for office takes money, so that didn't work out.

I never knew him though, through all these years, to seem ever discouraged. He always said things will work out all right for us. But I must admit that sometimes I had some doubt about it.

And now the children were trying to get through school. Thomas went to Oklahoma A. & M. College, and by working part time he got through four years. He also won a scholarship medal which gave him two years in Boston to complete his engineering course.

Rebecca was now in high school and a good student making good grades all through school. She was popular with her teachers and her classmates.

Dixie had gotten a place as page in the state legislature. He was only 10 years old when he first went to work, and he served three terms, keeping up his school work all the time with his teacher's help. Then Joe Thompson, who was a member of the legislature, said to Dixie, "I am running for U. S. Congress, and if I am elected I will have you appointed a page." He was elected and after he got to Washington he wrote Dixie and told him he had been appointed a page. We were very proud of him but hated to see him go - just 12 years old and by himself. He served two terms in Congress, and it looked like he was well on his way for a political career.

Emily was in grade school. She was not an outstanding scholar, but had a lot of friends and a good time. She was particularly fond of sports and could outbox any of the boys, much to young Dixie's disgust.

Money matters were worrying us right along. We were trying to get the children through school. They needed so many things we were not able to do

or have for them, and to say they had it kind of hard would not be exaggerating. But they did all get through school, and we were proud of them.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

And it wasn't long then until they were all starting families of their own, and there followed many happy years for us as the grandchildren came along.

Ella Glenn and Charlie had one boy, Charles, Jr., and he was the first grandchild and a wonder to all.

Marie married Dick Louthan - she had met him while she was living with us in Oklahoma City. They had one little boy, Martin. He, of course, was fine, and we were proud of another boy in the family.

Thomas met Eulala Rogers in college, and after finishing school they were married and had two little girls, Nina Emily and Carol Lynn, the first girls in the family. They were both lovely little girls and Eulala made all their clothes and often dressed them alike. Then, when Carol Lynn was 12 years old they had a little boy and named him Thomas Prather Gilmer, Jr. and he was welcomed

after all those years of waiting for him - the first boy to carry on the Gilmer name.

Rebecca met Howard Whitehurst at the state capitol where she was working. His father was president of the Board of Agriculture. They had one little girl, Marie Lucille, a nice little girl with a wonderful disposition.

There is so much I want to say about Dixie, but you all know that he would have been one of the leading politicians in the state if he had only had the strength. He had energy and brains and wanted so much to accomplish so many things, but he lacked the strength. However, he fought to keep going to the end in spite of his illness.

Dixie met Ellen McClure in Wetumka when he was in his first law practice after finishing law school at University of Oklahoma. Ellen was from Texas and was teaching school in Henryetta when they met. With Ellen's encouragement, Dixie went on to become County Attorney of Tulsa County and was re-elected for six terms. In 1946 he ran for governor and was defeated in the run-off by Roy Turner by only 25,000 votes. And in 1948 he was elected to the 81st U. S. Congress from the Tulsa district. We were all always proud of him.

Emily met Ralph (Doc, we call him) Wolfe here

in Oklahoma City. They were a little late getting started, but they had the largest family of all -- one boy, Joe, and three fine little girls, Dixie Marie, Marion and Louise.

Incidentally, it seemed to be understood that Grandma was always a little partial to Joe. From the time he was a baby I was with him more than with the other grandchildren. He loved it with his Grandpa and Grandma Galmer in our little home and I always tried to help him out with any little difficulty that came up. I guess he has not forgotten it, for he never neglects me for anything, not even his best girl. And I want to say of all my grandchildren how wonderful they have always been to me.

During the years that the grandchildren were growing up, Oklahoma City was, of course, a central place for all, for there were three families here (Marie's, Rebecca's and Emily's) each with comfortable homes. What with Grandpa's and my little place, we always had room for all and something was always going on.

Thomas and Eulala and Dixie and Ellen were in Tulsa. Eulala had some wonderful affairs for all the family, everybody welcome anytime, and always something good to eat. Dixie was county attorney

in Tulsa for 12 years and Grandpa certainly had a lot of pleasure sitting around the courthouse. We both enjoyed it there always with Dixie and Ellen.

Ellie Glenn and Charlie continued to live in Ardmore. Charlie has always been considered a great entertainer, and one cold Christmas they had all the family there for a reunion. Ellie Glenn had cots made down all over the place and fires going all night.

Dick Louthan and Marie never missed a single one of the family gatherings. Dick had been raised in a family of one boy and he enjoyed being in the midst of everything.

Doc and Emily were getting busy raising a family, but Doc was a good provider, and they often managed to enlarge the table and have an affair for the family.

And I guess all of us, grandchildren and all, still remember when Howard inherited the big farm and house from his father. It was just 13 miles out of Oklahoma City, and Howard and Rebecca just moved out during the summer. They grew all kinds of fruit and did not sell anything, so the family had a wonderful time, and everyone who went out there left with a car loaded with something. Once Howard raised a bunch of turkeys. He said he was

going to start selling them, but the price of turkeys went down and they just decided to eat them. They had big turkey dinners constantly. It was the first time I had ever been tired of turkeys. Everybody was disappointed when they sold the farm. But I'm sure we'll never forget the long table and the big turkey dinners.

We all have many wonderful memories of those years when we were living so near to each other that we could get together for family parties every few weeks.

## EPILOGUE

### SOMETIME LATER:

Since writing the first part of this some months previous, I have gone through a lot of trouble, losing two children at almost the same time - the first ones in the family to pass away with the exception of their father. You all know all about it and have gone through it with me, so I will not dwell on it.

During this difficult time, though, I've thought often of a little poem that was written some years ago, before each one accumulated a family of his own. It's called "The Stick-Together Families," and it is by Edgar Guest.

The stick-together families are happier by far  
Than the brothers and the sisters who take  
                                                separate highways are.  
The gladdest people living are the wholesome  
                                                folks who make  
A circle at the fireside that no power but  
                                                death can break.

And the finest of conventions ever held beneath  
the sun  
Are the little family gatherings when the busy  
day is done.

There are rich folk, there are poor folk, who  
imagine they are wise,  
And they're very quick to shatter all the  
little family ties.  
Each goes searching after pleasure in his own  
selected way,  
Each with strangers likes to wander, and with  
strangers likes to play.  
But it's bitterness they harvest, and it's  
empty joy they find,  
For the children that are wisest are the  
stick-together kind.

Well, our family is still sticking together,  
and that's how we all got through Dixie's and  
Marie's long illnesses and suffering.

I am aware that it is not in good form to brag  
on one's family, but this little book is for you  
and it gives me a chance to say what I otherwise  
could not. I have been right near you and have  
lived with you, especially these last years and

even before Grandpa passed away, spending part  
time with each one, and never once do I recall a  
word or a time that any one of my family has ever  
intimated that they were not really pleased to  
have me, meaning my whole family which would con-  
sist of 40 if they were all still living. That in-  
cludes all my sons-in-law and daughters-in-law,  
my 10 grandchildren and their husbands and wives  
and my great-grandchildren, 12 now in number.

As for my great-grandchildren, incidentally,  
I always carry their pictures in a little Kodak  
book in my purse, and they may have been taught,  
but when I arrive they seem delighted to see me.  
They seem to think a great-grandma is a rare thing.  
One little girl introduces me to her friends as  
Greatest-Grandma. Well, that's the way I feel  
about my whole family.

I have really enjoyed recalling the past and  
trying to bring it to you. (I do want you to know,  
though, that if it had not been for the encourage-  
ment and help that Carol Lynn and her husband,  
David have given me I might have given up the  
project.) In thinking about what I've written I  
realize that I overlooked mentioning that during  
my lifetime I remember the first automobiles, the  
first airplanes, the first gas stoves and cook-