

## ANECDOTES OF THE AREA

One wife outside, of Bladenboro, went to see Dr. Divine in Clarkton. She needed medicine for her husband and for her mule. She said, "Mark that medicine well cause, I'm really going to need that there mule."

Sarah Bradshaw Pait, who lived near Abbottsburg had a grandfather that was in the Civil War. Sarah's grandmother made a table cloth for the oldest son using cotton that needed to have the seeds removed. She put the children to removing the seeds so as to card, spin and weave the cloth. Each child had to fill one of their shoes with seeds each night. The older son complained about having the biggest shoe to fill, and the children said, "It's what you get for having such a big foot."

Sarah gave the finished table cloth, which is over 100 years old to the Bladenboro Historical Museum along with the account of its making. Sarah also gave pictures of her grandmother and grandfather.

### TOAD, A BEAR AND 'CREDIT'

Billy Frink had a grandfather named William E. Lewis that lived beside the marsh at Hickory Grove. The family was big on nicknames, and William Lewis was called 'Toad'. His wife was called 'Mache' for Mary Rachel. 'Toad' raised hogs with the help of a black man, a former slave before Abe Lincoln's 'Emancipation Proclamation'. Being very old, the free

man stayed on with William E. Lewis and Mary Rachel Lewis. As a slave he had taken his master's last name and was a Lewis, and in his lineage was to come Armpstead Lewis and Homer Lewis. The former slave was also the great great grandfather of Wadell Davis who today works at 'C.W.'s Anto Service' in Bladenboro.

It was a time when farmers had to have everything that could work, working. The entire South was under Federal law and taxes, and if any taxes were paid they generally went North. Life was hard and everyone had to be their own defense. William E. Lewis had a hound to help him with defending his live stock, especially his hogs.

One day, William heard a commotion in the direction of the hog lot and recognized the black form of a bear after his hogs. William leaped into action. His hound, named 'Credit' awaited him at the door, and his black worker joined the defenders as they rushed towards the hog lot. Of course, William had his gun, a long muzzle loader with a ram rod and powder horn.

'Credit' was a hunting dog with skills in attack, the art of attack, and the agility of retreat. 'Toad' Lewis was about to discover that he himself also had as many skills in retreat as his dog had. His first shot only called attention to the bear that a relatively helpless man was trying to scare him with a loud noise. The bear must have despised noises like that, for he came at William E. Lewis with solid intentions of putting a stop to further 'booms'.

Everyone knows that when you shoot a muzzle loader you must work a few quick minutes to get ready to fire again. The black man did not have to think of but one thing, and that was to cover as much ground in a few seconds as was possible for him at his ripe old age. 'Credit' did a flanking movement, while the bear focused on 'Toad'. Toad with drew the ram rod.

'Credit' became a credit to the cause again. Once more teeth into the bear's flank. It must have been about like a mosquito human, for the bear swatted at the pesky hound and whirled around times. While the bear and 'Credit' were playing crack-the-whip, ramming the rod home on the powder, patch and lead ball.

Again the dog was shaken loose giving the bear freedom man with the noisy stick. At close range Lewis made sure of his 'Credit' was flanking the bear again and lunging towards the bear came the dreadful noise that brought a black cloud of smoke. 'Credit' struck a vital spot on the bear. 'Credit' reached the hind leg for but the lead ball was fatal to the bear.

William E. Lewis knew who the real hero of the fight he that time on, he gave credit to 'Credit' and there was not a hound area that received better provisions than did that long, lanky, big William E. Lewis was duty bound to feed that hound, and so his "Toad" maintained all bragging rights to that hound.

(Narrated by Billy Frink, July 30, 2002)



## A BLACK FAMILY OUT OF THE PAST

Towards the end of the eighteenth hundreds a town called Yorkville toddled into being two miles west of bladenboro. It was anchored to the Seaboard Railroad by a platform, a store and several houses.

Yorkville's post office gouged out a place in the store, but it often received mail for York, South Carolina. Yorkville folks did not want to cause confusion, so they renamed their town Richardson to honor a train conductor who each Friday set off a churn of ice cream.

On the hot days of summer it was thrilling. Simply show up with a dish, spoon and a nickle and Lou Nance would scoop for you the treat of the hot week. The ice cream had been churned on the train coming from Wilmington, North Carolina.

During the early part of the century, black and white people worked together on the farms of the area. If black people lived in one place seven years, they were given the right to buy the place on which they lived. Their working together in farming made it possible for many Negro and white families to survive the Great Depression. A few Negroes even edged towards the American dream of home ownership.

But one unique family is remembered who did not even know Americans were suppose to have the dream of home ownership. They were a step below the feudalism known as 'sharecropping'. They were not classed as complete people. They were just called 'hands'.

Richardson's oldest citizens remember Armpstead Lewis, his wife Sophie and Homer Lewis, their son. After eighty five years some fiction enhances their stories, for they have been recalled at the fireplace in winter and

at family reunions in summer. Hard times lead the Lewis family to often fail, yet each member did triumph within the system despite all odds, for they are still remembered, and rightly so.

Armstead was born after the Civil War during the 'Reconstruction Period.' For him, the political slogan, 'Forty acres and a mule,' was an empty promise. He received neither mule or land. He developed his natural skills and abilities. He became strong and swift of foot and survived by hunting.

'Armp' as he was called, would outrun his dogs to head off a rabbit, or slap a running deer while yelling, "If you can't run faster dan dat, git out of my way." Legend has Armp grabbing a deer by the tail and letting it land ski him across an open field. He raced a train from Bladenboro to Butters and won the contest. He was Olympic material.

One Sunday, when Armp was suppose to be in church, he found himself rabbit hunting. His dogs ran a rabbit up inside a hollow tree. Armp started to twist the rabbit out of the hole with a bramble vine. Armp told some friends, "I heard that cotton tail squeal, "Come up de hollow a little further, Armp'. When dat rabbit talked to me, I left there running."

Armp never considered it, but Butter's Lumber Company had a notorious ventriloquist working for it. He had broken up a funeral in Rocky Mount by talking out of the casket, "Boys, let me down gentle," and according to Neil Edwards, may have called one man in Butters into the Christian ministry.

Armpstead usually traveled in the midst of his pack of dogs. Once he sold a dog for a little spending money. The buyer had asked, "Armp, will he tree?" Armp whistled and said, "Will he tree?" The buyer took that for a big "yes" and he bought the dog. Soon the customer brought the dog back and

said, "He won't tree. Armp, you said he would tree."

Armp replied, "I never lied to you. I only whistled and repeated your question."

Near the end of the 1800's, a school teacher named Sophie Hughes came to the Richardson area from Clarkton. She may have been a 'field school' teacher. Sophie had a rich voice and loved to sing while playing Amazing Grace on the piano at the Bryant Swamp Baptist Church. She was faithful in her attendance to her church.

Leo Hester went to hear a black evangelist who preached there. Sophie was present. The minister gave them the 'hell fire and damnation' treatment and then lifted up the joys and blessings of 'heaven', the latter being the better choice of the two. As the minister pressed for an immediate decision, Sophie shouted, "You tell 'em preacher. I've got my ticket."

Children loved Sophie and called her 'Miss Sophie Blue' for blue was her favorite color, and she always wore that color. And the children noticed something else. Sophie Blue was superstitious and would not cross a line they drew with a stick in the dusty road. Children would see her coming and make a line with a stick or white flour. Sophie would go into the woods rather than cross that line.

If Sophie stopped and talked with someone, and while she was talking a child drew a circle around her, she would become frantic while trying to escape the circle. Finally, in desperation, Sophie would erase a place, step out and quickly be on her way. William Butler remembers if someone placed sticks in the form of a cross on her lunch bucket, she would not eat her food that was in the pail.

Somehow the swift-moving hunter, Armpstead drew a circle around

her that she did not get out of for years. They married and had a child in 1901. They named him Homer Lewis. Armp would hunt and keep meat on the table for life was more serious now since he had to hunt for three hungry people. Sophie worked at odd jobs usually cleaning yards and houses. Armp finally became a cook at Butter's lumber company.

Sophie was a good mother to little Homer. She wanted him to learn. When he became six, she enrolled him in Bryant Swamp School which was located where the Bryant Swamp Baptist Church is today. Homer had a difficult time in school because he stuttered.

While Homer was in school his mother would sweep yards and wash clothes. She would take bundles of clothes to Reedy Branch run, wash them and drape them on bushes, and sit down near the bushes and sleep until the clothes were dry.

Sophie was enterprising. She began to make brooms, some of reeds, dogwood, and some of straw. She swept yards and sold brooms. Sometimes she was paid as much as 15 cents or given food on her best days. Sophie walked for miles searching for broom straw. Once when Sophie brought a bundle home by the mill, a worker came up behind her and stuck a lighted match to the bundle. It caused quite a commotion as Sophie ran away from the burning straw.

During the Great Depression, she became known as 'Aunt Sophie.' In those days she seldom left home without her blue back spelling book and her white goose that followed her. When she came to where children were outdoors playing, she would sit them down on a log. Then she and the goose would teach them spelling.

One evening Sophie came into Bladenboro. She had left the goose at

home but brought a rooster carrying it under one arm. She could have put the rooster down several times but insisted on holding it tightly. Someone asked her why she had the rooster, and Sophie said, "He has misbehaved, and I am punishing him. She was a teacher and tried to discipline even her rooster.

Sophie Blue was given a little pig for some yard work she had done. Though it weighed about fifteen pounds, Sophie carried it under her arm all the way from Butters into Bladenboro, a distance of about three miles. This burden tired her out. She was glad to set it down on the scales so she could sell it. The buyer said, "Aunt Sophie, this pig does not weigh hardly anything."

With perfect logic, since the longer she had carried the pig, the heavier he had seemed to be come, Sophie said, "Leave him on the scales a little while and he will become heavier."

Sophie and Armp's son, Homer, grew up with craftsman's skills. Like many young boys, Homer built a tree house some fifteen feet off the ground beside a road. He loved animals, just like his father and mother did, and he had a goat, "Bub, bub, bu, Billy." When Homer discovered the goat, "Bub,bub,bu, Billy" could walk a plank, Homer built a long wooden trail up and into the tree house. People would travel along the road, look up at the tree house and see the goat looking out a window at them,

Homer loved to drive machinery. Due to his spasmophenia, or stuttering, he had never learned to read rapidly. Homer wanted his driver's license and got the examiner to read out the questions, and he would answer them. There were three squares for Homer to choose from. He said, "The bo-bo-bottom box." He was proud he had passed the exam and went out to drive trucks, tractors, wagons and cars for farmers in the area.

While Homer was becoming self sustaining, Armp and Sophie faced one economic crisis after another. Their conversations turned into arguments over earning and spending. These arguments tore them apart many times and finally broke up their marriage for good during the hard times of the Great Depression. When they separated the final time, Armp kept a hut in Butters and Sophie lived in a shack in winter and in the woods in summer near Richardson.

The Butter's Lumber Company had moved up from Boardman in 1926, to establish a place called Butters. Armpstead had gone to work as a cook for the Company. One day he went to the home of Leo Hester and asked to buy a goat for \$2.00. Thinking Armp wanted to raise goats, Leo offered a nice nanny goat. Armp bought it. As Leo was taking the money, Armpstead tilted back the goat's head and slit it's throat. Armp was buying it for food. When Leo later spoke of this he said, "There was not a thing I could do then. I already had the money in my pocket."

Armpstead was in Butters the night, in the mid thirties, when the Butter's lumber fire occurred. Some say they could read a newspaper a half mile away from the blaze. Fire was greatly feared in those days. Dale Hinson was a young man then and stood between Jim Edward's house and Mr. Carrol's house and watched sheets of flames vanish into the sky.

A small patch of woods stood between the lumber stacks and the helpless town. Fire was charging into the woods so quickly there was little hope of a single house being spared. Families were collecting their belongings and running away. It was a frantic moment. Almost everyone seemed confused and helpless.

Dale saw a man rush by him to be silhouetted against the flames. It

was Armpstead Lewis. For sometime he had been going to Church instead of hunting on Sunday. He lifted his arms towards the heavens and began a mighty prayer. "O Lord, God of heaven and earth, send a soaking rain upon this town and prevent its total and certain destruction." Dale continued to stand near Armpstead while he pleaded for deliverance. Dale said, "Before the fire crossed the trees and got to the first house, a time of no more than thirty minutes, the greatest rain that I ever had seen hit Butters and secured the houses. Somehow Armp had learned to pray and get good results."

Armp's age moved him out of the workforce a few years later but not out of the gratitude of those whose houses had been spared. He moved from Butters to a house near the present home of Isaac and Nina Singletary on Reedy Creek. There he lived out his life befriended by Ike Singletary and his family. Duk Singletary, a friend of Armp's said, "The church bell rang 80 or 85 times. We knew Armp was out running heaven's glory train on streets of gold."

By this time Homer was making his own way. He was a pacifist to the bone. Robert Singletary said, "There was no fight in him. He would run from any kind of trouble, and he was fast like Armp. If someone threatened him, Homer would say, "I, I, I, will take this axe and put three chops on a tree, and you know wha, wha what will happen to you." It was Homer's way of kidding about a hex.

When Homer was talking, if his stuttering would get too bad he would shift to poetry to hit a rhythm and not stutter. To chew someone out was called 'sacking'. It is the same term used now in football when the quarter back is downed behind the line of scrimmage. Homer could only verbally sack someone in gentle poetry like, "Yo, Yo, You are a jerk if you don't work".

The victims of his attacks said, "It was like being stoned to death with marshmallows."

Armstead had gone to church in his latter years after the talking rabbit up in the hollow tree scared him into it. Of course, Sophie had gone most of her life and had loved to sing. Homer was late in getting into the church. Maybe it was because of his speech impediment. Maybe it was because he was a slow reader. In spite of Sophie's pleading, Homer had delayed joining the church as Armp had done before him.

If Homer went riding in a buggy or wagon, his horse would wear harness decorated with roses, if roses were in season. Every journey was a parade. Homer had advanced from wagons to buggies, to tractors, trucks and cars. Nothing pleased him more than to approach a church with the car horn blaring. He would roar by with his ham hand waving at people who would hear him coming and run out to see him go by. This habit was so regular it got him the nickname 'Tooter-Ree'.

Homer was a light skin, hard working man. He farmed for every farmer who needed him. He even went to Tabor City and raised tobacco for J. C. Singletary. While there, Homer lived in a well equipped trailer, and he worked through the planting, growing, and harvest season. The Singletary family there would have had a difficult time without Homer.

When the tobacco crop was harvested and sold in 1941 in Tabor City, Homer had done well. He came to Lumberton and put his savings in a fancy 1928, seven passenger Chrysler. It had 30 inch tires, wooden spokes, a luggage rack and spare tire on the back. Its canvas top made it look handsome, but it was the round, silver, accelerator peddle that caught Homer's eye. This car would make a big splash when he

came through Richardson tooting and celebrating. Homer bought the car. That evening found him at Carey Brown's store near Butters.

Clayton Barfield, Ervin Taylor, Hugh and Wilson Singletary were hanging around with little to do but smoke, bum rides and crack jokes. One of them asked Homer what he smoked. He replied, "I, I, use to smoke Luck, Luckies, but now I smoke Che, Che, Chesterfields".

Jabe Frink arrived at the station as Hugh Singletary was filling the gas tank on the Chrysler for 'Tooter-Ree's car. Homer was saying, "The drive from Lum, Lum, Lumberton is as fa, fa, far as I've been."

Hugh hung up the nozzle declaring, "You can drive us 'til we sweat." Before Jabe could get into the Chrysler, the crowd slammed the door. 'Tooter Ree' tooted onto 211 highway and headed for Lumberton.

The road had been an Indian trail. Farmers had improved it by adding a wooden bridge and a gate that would open through a pasture, for it was a pasture first. Jack Kitchen, a contractor, built a better bridge, and by 1941 the gate was no longer used.

When Homer breezed the Chrysler across the bridge, the lights from another car caused him to veer too far to the right. He lost control and the Chrysler flipped upside down off the road. This was not the kind of splash Homer had intended to make. As the men crawled out of the car, Homer was no where to be found. He had fled at Armpstead speed.

Homer had taken a lesson from Lot's wife and never looked back, for he thought he had killed them all, and by nature he would not hurt a fly. After running some distance into the swamp, he finally glanced back and could see smoke rising from where the car had landed. It was burning like a pile of stove wood. When Hugh Singletary reached the road, all were accounted for

except Homer. They did not know where he was.

It was several days before Homer amassed enough courage to creep back to Carey Brown's store. Homer was glad to hear that his friends were all alive. They came into the store, by and by, and asked where he had been, and he said, "I've been in the swamp sit-sit-sitting on a tuf-tuf-tuffet. And a big owl sitting in a tree said, 'Who-who-who is you.' And I said, 'hu-hu-hush you fool. I'm trying to escape.'" Homer thought the lawmen were after him and the owl would alert them.

Homer had lost a year's wages in six hours, but he went back to work to buy another car. In 1957, Homer joined the Bryant Swamp Baptist Church, gave up his vices, and became an usher and soloist. He loved to sing, but he could not get the choir to stutter at the same time he did. They pressed him to do solo work and he would present, "Si-si-sing them over again to Me-me-me," and "In the swee-swee-sweet by and by-by-by." His favorite seemed to be, "I, I, I'll fly, fly, fly, away, O Glory." And he did fly away.

Four years later, as he was leaving his trailer in Tabor City to go hunting, his gun trigger caught on a wire going to a window fan. The blast struck him in the chest. When friends found him, Homer was kneeling with his elbows on his bed and his hands clasped in prayer. The church bell tolled 61 times. A beautiful stone in the Singletary Cemetery in Butters reads, "Homer Lewis, 1906-1962".

Children had been so entertained by him, they soon missed him. Robert Singletary went out to his corn crib into the semidarkness of one evening. James his son, age 5, went with him. Robert opened the crib door and a cat leaped over them both and shot into the semidarkness of the twilight. James said, "Dady, was that Homer?" Robert came to his house and said to his wife, "James thinks Homer is still alive and in the corn crib."

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The town of Richardson came and vanished like the mythical Irish town, Brigadoon. Even these disestablished people, Armpstead, Sophie, and Homer imprinted their lives into the memories of those about them. They vanished but have lingered, and that is good, for people are not really gone until they are no longer remembered.

