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## Alton Parsons Family

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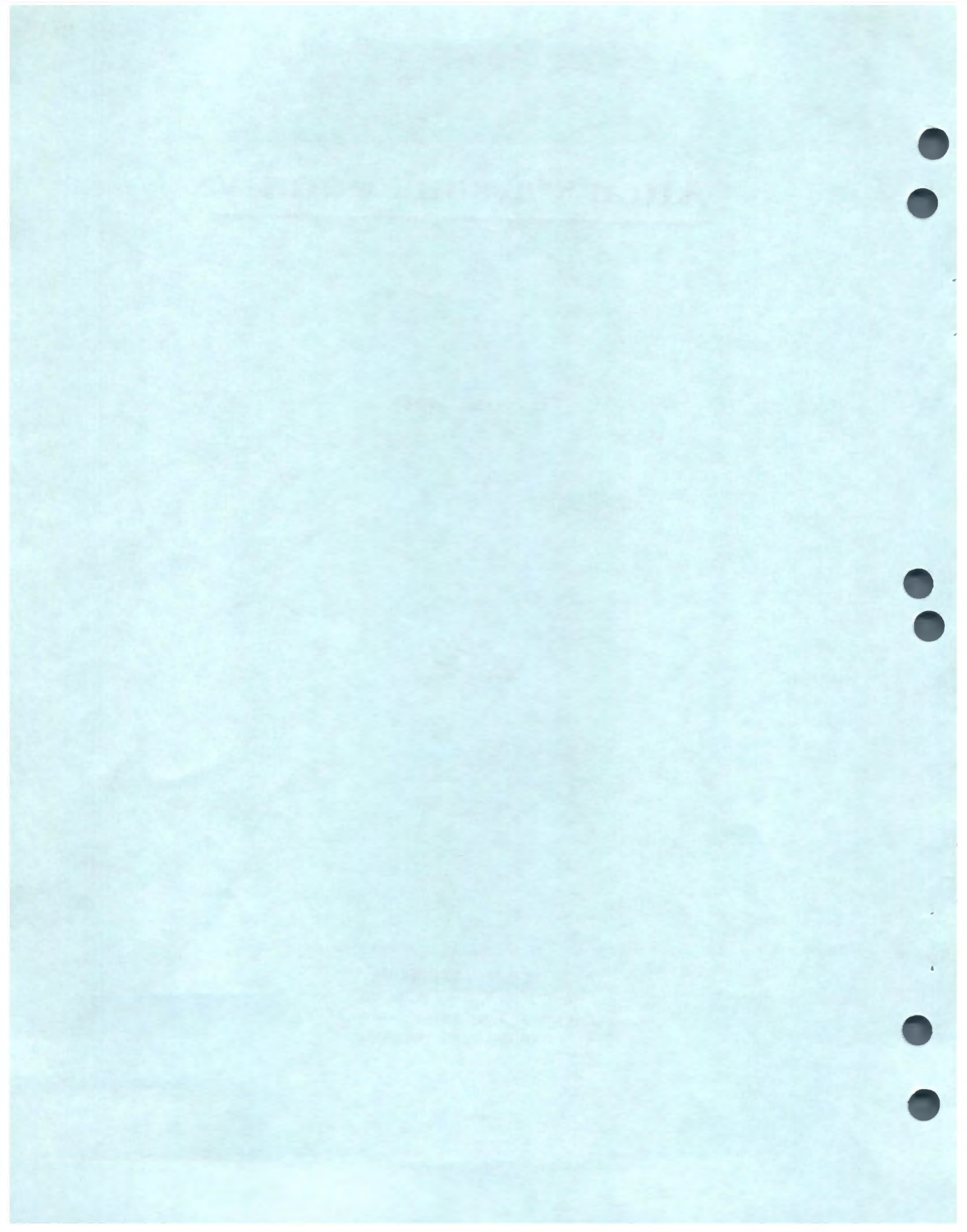
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# Alton Parsons Family

(Revised 1992)



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## ALTON PARSONS FAMILY WATCHED DEVELOPMENT

### OF BEECH CREEK JUNCTION, BEECHMONT AREA

BY BOBBY ANDERSON

**BEECHMONT** -- George Parsons, Beechmont, Ky., 42324.

Some know him as a retired coal miner, a master welder, adept at keeping coal mine machinery running.

Four children know him as "daddy", while his wife knows him as a husband of 58 years.

Many more know him as a master wood crafter, a maker of fine supplemental furniture -- attest the many comfortable porch swings made by his hands and enjoyed by his family and friends.

But in this article you will learn of his value in another area -- his memory of early Beech Creek Junction, today's Beechmont, and the history surrounding the community.

George Parsons moved, with his family, to Beech Creek Junction, then more aptly called "The Junction" by most folks of his day. This was in 1920, when he was seven years old. His father, Alton Parsons, had been a railroad section foreman for the L&N railroad, stationed at Twin Tunnels (living in one of the railroad section houses there, one of which is still standing). Alton Parsons resigned his railroad position in 1917, and became a coal miner. After three years of living in a log house at Union Ridge and working in the Beech Creek coal mine, Alton Parsons bought "18 or 20 acres" of the Terry property, across the L&N Railroad from what is now Hughes-Kirk school. (His sister, Mabel recalls they lived the log house two years, and another farm house the next year before moving to "The Junction". See her "memories" in later paragraphs.)

"When we moved here", George Parsons recalls, "there was no road to the house. Just the Browder to Belton wagon road, several hundred yards away. We moved in through the woods".

He recalls that there were four farm houses in the area commonly referred to today as Beechmont. "The one we moved into, one where the Baptist church is now, where Esley Walls lived, and two more on the east side of the railroad, behind where Pal Fleming used to live".

"We had to go to Belton to get our mail, until dad put up a box on the route between Belton, Browder and Ennis. That was several hundred yards behind the house". Belton, at that time was only a portion of what is known as Belton today. The other area, and the post office was known as Yost. In 1925, the two areas merged under the now-known name of Belton.

Later, his dad sold a tract of the land facing the railroad to a developer, who sold lots and built houses there. Many of those houses are standing today. George's sister, Mabel, recalls that the auction of the lots was held on July 4, 1922, "it was quite a day....barbecue, ice cream and the nice little things that were not an every day occurrence back then", she remembered.

As with the mail, shopping was done at Belton, or Mr. Parsons brought home supplies from the company store at Beech Creek.

#### **The First Store**

George Parsons remembers well the first store at the Junction which got its name because this is where the railroad made its

junction with the rail spur running into Beech Creek, to serve the mines there. First called Beech Creek Junction, it soon gained its colloquial name, "The Junction" which remained the common name for the community until it was named Beechmont with the coming of the post office in 1959.

That first store near "The Junction" was operated by Brad Langley, and was near to where the present-day street, Tiger Drive, crosses the old railroad bed. It began operation about 1921-22. Soon, George Mahan, next door, ran a small grocery in conjunction with another business he operated. Ulie McElwain operated an early store and later, Seymour and Bessie McElwain had a store there also, which they operated until they moved it to the new highway in the 1930s.

The road from the Browder area to Belton was built in this era also, running on the east side of the railroad, until it crossed over at Belton. Alton Parsons gave a portion of the right of way for this road. About 1928, a new road was built, Mr. Parsons noted, where the present Highway 431 runs. It was known as Highway 81 and/or Highway 75, until it received federal recognition and a federal number (431) in the 1950s. This road was paved (macadamized) in the mid-1930s.

According to George Parsons' amazing memory of Beechmont and its early history, Habra Martin opened the first store, next door to Hughes-Kirk school, on that new highway. This store existed for many years, with Oscar Porter, James Steele and others succeeding Mr. Martin.

Shortly after Martin opened his store, C. E. (Everett) McLemore moved an old store building from the Beech Creek-Wyatt's Chapel area to "The Junction" and operated it, as well as a restaurant, in that building. Today's Beechmont Post Office is in an annex of that building, which still stands.

#### The Browder Storm

One event in his life, which George Parsons remembers well, was the tornado of 1942 which struck the Sylvania-Browder area, and extended on toward Paradise, killing ten area residents on March 16.

"Me and my wife had just built this house", he said motioning to his home located on land originally purchased by his father. "We only had two rooms done, this kitchen, and the front room. I came out of the mines (Black Diamond) that day, and the sky looked threatening. Real different. We came on home, and as usual, I got behind the kitchen stove in the corner to take my bath. While I was taking my bath, my wife called me to the window. I looked out and tin roofing my brother Hammond had stacked down by his house, was flying through the air and blowing away. His toilet started tumbling away in the wind. Mine would have blown away, too, if I had not put poles in the ground and nailed my toilet to it. I did that to keep Hallowe'en pranksters from turning it over".

He learned later of the devastation of the storm, and described it in detail. The next Sunday, his family visited his wife's brother, Hugh Nole, near Browder, "and me and Hugh walked the path of the storm from Browder to Paradise. It went all the way to the river, and it looked like someone had taken a rake and broom and cleaned out the path where the storm hit. It cleaned out its path that well".

Besides the loss of lives and the property damage, he described



how the storm leveled Clarence Turner's barn "with several mules and cows in it. He worked all day tearing away the barn to get his animals out. I think he just had one mule killed".

### His Father's Life

George Parsons described how his father lost two wives before moving to Muhlenberg County from Owensboro and/or southern Indiana.

"His first wife (He married July 17, 1890 to Virginia Logsdon) died in childbirth, I think, and his second one died after three children were born. Her name, before they married was (Ruth) Higgs. He was transferred to South Carrollton, before moving to Twin Tunnels as section foreman prior to 1910".

(George's sister, Mabel, provided the name of Alton Parson's first wife, and the date. She also recalled that the child was a son, Ellis, who later died at the age of six months with scarlet fever. He died at the home of an uncle and aunt, Stanley and Nannie Parsons in Daviess County).

There Alton Parsons lived with his three young children, Hammond, who was later to be postmaster at Beechmont, Rozella and Mabel, with a step-daughter, Margaret (Maggie) Eulak (later Wallace), who was some older than his own children. He oversaw the maintenance and repair of the railroad track and other properties between Dunmor and Drakesboro.

Around 1910, one of the tunnels of the tandem called "Twin Tunnels" fell in, stopping all railroad traffic temporarily. Parsons' section crew, with contract labor, removed the fallen rock and dirt over a lengthy period of time, before normal rail traffic was resumed.

One of the things his crew did, was to level another grade beside the fallen tunnel, and lay another track there, so the four daily passenger trains, plus the freight and coal trains could by-pass the cave-in. However, prior to getting this done, the L&N line would run its regular passenger trains to the fallen tunnel, then escort the passengers around the disaster, on foot to another train awaiting on the other side. This was done for several weeks until the auxiliary line was completed around the tunnel.

"One of the tasks of the section crew at that time", George Parsons recalled hearing his father say, "was to escort the passengers from one train to the other, and to carry their luggage."

Finally, the section crew and the contract workers were able to remove all the fallen rock and dirt, and re-establish the track. Since that day, there has been only one tunnel in the area, but the area continues to be called Twin Tunnels (or today, many contend, Twin Tunnel, without the pluralization).

George Parsons also recalls the flag station at Twin Tunnels.

"There was no depot there, but between the tunnels, there was a small building the railroad company put up. You could wait for the train in there, and flag it as it approached, get on and ride to where you wanted to go".

During his tenure as section foreman, and while living in the section house with his three children and step-daughter, Alton Parsons met and married his third wife. She was Carrie Hardison of the Mud River Union area, the daughter of John Wesley and Alice Turner Hardison. They were married on Dec. 25, 1910, and continued to live in the section house until 1917. Their first

children were born in this house. According to Mabel Parsons Phelps, the four sons were born at Twin Tunnels, and the daughters at Beech Creek Junction.

In order, the children of Alton and Carrie Parsons were: Orville, George, Harland, Carlisle, Alton and Lola Mae.

Alton Parsons was born March 25, 1872 and died Sept. 16, 1935. His wife, Carrie, born Feb. 21, 1887, died May 27, 1965 while living with a daughter near Louisville. They are buried at Union Ridge.

George Parsons says he never knew his paternal grandfather who died while Alton Parsons was very young. He recalled seeing his grandmother Sarah (Crow) only once. Mabel has other memories of the grandmother, more vivid, which she shared in a recent letter, and which are included in later paragraphs.

A search of early records in Daviess County fails to show Alton Parsons' first marriage, but records in Muhlenberg County show his second wife, and the mother of Hammond, Rozella and Mabel to be Ruth Higgs. Ruth was apparently the daughter of Thomas Allen Higgs (son of Allen Higgs), who was a widower when the 1900 census of Daviess County was taken. Higgs was born in September, 1834, and in his home, his daughter, Ruth Parsons (May, 1875) and son-in-law, Alton Parsons, lived with him. Also there was the granddaughter, perhaps the one George Parsons mentioned as Margaret. She was listed as Maggie Eulak (or Enlar: census notation).

Both Hammond and Rozella Parsons, in their marriage applications, lists Ruth Higgs as their mother.

There is no information on the Parsons family in Daviess County prior to this. However, in Daviess in 1900 several more Parsons families were listed, including Murray, a railroad worker, who apparently was the son of Stanley and Nannie Parsons. Murray Parsons later came to Muhlenberg County also as a railroad worker. At Dunmor, in 1903, he married Elizabeth Garrettson, daughter of D. C. and M. E. Newman Garrettson.

In Alton Parsons' own marriage license in Muhlenberg County, when he married Carrie Hardison, he states he was born in Daviess County and that his father was James Parsons and his mother Sarah J. Crow. Miss Crow was from Daviess County, and James Parsons was listed as being born in Kentucky -- but the name of the county is unreadable in the marriage book. Because the spelling is similar to Hawesville (Hancock County), a search was made there, and one family, Isaac and Eliza Parsons, was found. They had two sons, whose initials were J. and J. T., who could have been the James Parsons, father of Alton. However, no other record was found to substantiate this.

#### The Woodcrafter

As noted, George Parsons, as well as his brother, Harland, who lives nearby, are woodcrafters -- builders of items made from wood.

George, among other things, makes porch swings and other porch and lawn furniture known for their comfort and long life. He also has made many of the items of furniture in his home, which he built himself, with the help of his wife. He makes inlaid checker boards, paper towels dispensers, lamps, baby beds, quilt racks, and a large assortment of other items. All of this is done in the shop in back of his house, situated on the same farm his father bought in 1920, and where George has spent the most of his 78

years. Incidentally, his brother, Harland, and his late brother Hammond's wife, Ada, still live on that same tract of land.

George Parsons was born Aug. 22, 1913 and on Feb. 24, 1934, he married Opaline Nole, daughter of Hubert Nole of near Ennis.

They have four children, Rosalee, Dora June, Betty Lou and John Wayne.

#### Mabel's Memories

Mabel Parsons Phelps of Louisville, Alton Parsons' baby child by his second wife, Ruth Higgs, is now 83-years-old, "tall and healthy and enjoying life". She has vivid and happy memories of her life at Twin Tunnels and Beech Creek Junction.

In recalling their move from L&N section house, Mabel noted, "We lived at Union Ridge in the old cabin for two years, then dad sold it to a Mr. Cox at Penrod. We moved to the Brodie Escue place the following year then moved to the Junction. I remember it (the Escue place) nestled in a little valley with the creek surrounding it, and a Mr. Clark and his family living across the creek. Mr. Tom Taggart and family lived at the top of the hill very close by us. We walked to school at Union Ridge and I remember slowing down and waiting for an adult to get in sight before I went by the cemetery, for I knew 'something' was going to grab me if I was alone. Old folks were very good ghost story tellers."

Adding to her brother's remembrance of early Beech Creek, Jct., she recalled one of the houses near to her dad's farm. "Monroe Hughes lived in a real old house. One of the most beautiful sights I can remember from childhood was looking down cross the fields during a severe winter and seeing the untracked snow rolling along, with the feeling that nature had just finished house cleaning".

"George failed to mention the nice walk to Hazel Creek school after we moved to the Junction. Mr. Jack Boatwright was our teacher, and taught from the first to eighth grades. We didn't have a school at the Junction then, but Dad often said, 'One of these days we'll have a school, churches and a post office. It's just a perfect place for a small town'.

"He hoped each of us would settle there, but fate decreed otherwise. I have often wished he could have lived long enough to see how it has grown and I am sure he would have been proud of it. Mr. Boatwright was an excellent teacher, but I never thought to tell him."

(Author's note: A. J. (Jack) Boatwright went on to become postmaster at Beech Creek for many years).

Mrs. Phelps recalled that her father first married Virginia Logsdon in 1890, and chronicled her death, and the death of their six-month old son, Ellis.

"Dad married my mother, Ruth Higgs on Dec. 10, 1899. She was the daughter of Thomas Allen Higgs. She had a small daughter, Margaret, and Rozella came along in 1904, then Hammond, and then me. Mother died the year (Dec. 29, 1909) I was born, in 1909, with pneumonia.

"My grandfather's brother, James Taylor Higgs, was county judge at Calhoun (McLean County) for sixteen years. Undoubtedly, some of my family records are in that county, also."

As noted earlier, Alton Parsons' father died leaving his widow in Daviess County, and with Alton in Muhlenberg, the grandchildren did not see their grandmother often. Mabel recalls,



"Dad's mother remarried and lived in Evansville, Ind. As cars were not plentiful in those days, and money wasn't either, we didn't see Grandma very much. She wrote often, and I still have the old-fashioned postcards that were sent to us at Yost, Ky., with one cent stamps. Her writing is very faint, but I was her darling. She had another group of children with this second marriage. Also, the Christopher Parsons you mention, was my dad's grandfather. he also had an uncle named Isaac, who was Murray's grandfather. Murray's sister, Lela, taught school for 48 years, a part of this being at Panther (Daviness County). She died in Memphis."

Mabel also stated that some of the family, the uncle Stanley, and the grandmother lived near Panther, and also near Hawesville in Hancock County, which might provide evidence that Alton, in securing his marriage license, was stating that his father was born at Hawesville, as speculated in earlier paragraphs.

She writes that many of the Parsons kin "strayed quite a piece" from home. A clipping from a newspaper in Parsons, Kansas, mentions her dad's cousin, Horace Parsons, as being the founder of the community. Also twin cousins, Harley and Carley, lived in Owensboro.

Mrs. Phelps says she also still retains a copy of a "hundred dollar bond that my dad took out so he could marry my mother". In earlier days, the bride did not go to the courthouse with the intended groom to secure the marriage license. Instead, the man was required to post a bond to insure his intentions were to marry, and the bond was forfeited if the marriage did not occur.

After watching Beechmont grow from the tiny farm area, to "Beech Creek Junction" and now Beechmont, Mabel Phelps sums it up in this manner, "I love the little town".

#### The Other Children

There are eight other Parsons children which George calls brothers and sisters. Three were from his second marriage; Hammond T., Rozella and Mabel and five others from his marriage to Carrie Hardison; Orville, Harland, Carlisle, Alton and Lola Mae.

HAMMOND T. PARSONS (10-20-1906 to 9-23-1986) married Ada Ivie Sumner (b. 1-6-1908), daughter of Pallace and Della Wagoner Sumner on Dec. 25, 1925. They were the parents of six children, a daughter, Nadine, who died as an infant, James, Lindell, Alvis, Billy and Gale. Hammond, for many years a postmaster at Beechmont, is deceased. He served from March 1, 1951 to April 30, 1972, when he retired due to ill health. His birthplace is listed as Daviness County. His widow still resides in their home in Beechmont.

ROZELLA PARSONS (12-4-1904 to 3-7-1931) married Zene Henderson (2-27-1895 to 8-16-1969) of Lewisburg on Dec. 10, 1922. He was a member of the work crew which was clearing land on the property Alton Parsons sold to a Lewisburg developer. J. B. Tunstill was the foreman. Zene and Rozella met, and were married six months later. Her sister, Mabel, called it "love at first sight". They also lived at Beech Creek Junction. They had two children, one (William T.) who died as an infant in 1923, and a son, Leonard Ray Henderson. Rozella died of pneumonia when Leonard Ray (Razor) was four years old. She listed her birthplace as Daviness County.

MABEL PARSONS, born Jan. 16, 1909, married William Marion Phelps of Horse Branch, a railroader, Nov. 4, 1925. He died on Sept. 23, 1990. She still resides in Louisville. Their children included Julia Ervina, William, Larry and Tommy.

ORVILLE PARSONS (1911-1942) was killed in a mining accident at Belton. He was married to Ruby Cartwright in 1931. She still lives at Beechmont in a home at the end of the old Parsons farm, which was built right after Orville was killed. Their children: Warren Alton, who died as a child in 1932, Ruby Lynn, Bobby, Carrie Mae, Aileen and Orville Newman.

HARLAND PARSONS still resides in Beechmont, on the old Parsons landholding. His first marriage to Thelma Lee Parker, daughter of Basil Parker of Beech Creek, ended when she was killed in an automobile accident in 1941. They also have an infant child buried beside her at Union Ridge. He is presently married to Evelyn Smith Kittinger, daughter of Horace Smith of Beech Creek. They have twin daughters, Susan and Vickie. Harland is also regarded as a wood crafter. Among his many items are martin houses and other bird houses, which are in demand in the area.

CARLYSLE PARSONS was an outstanding basketball player at Hughes-Kirk in the early 1930s. He now resides in Middletown, Ky. He married Mattylee Sumner of Ennis in 1937. She died in 1983, and Carlysle remarried Eva Mae Mitchell in 1984. His children are Eddie C., Michael Sumner and a daughter who died in infancy.

ALTON PARSONS, named for her father, first married Elmer Hornback of Louisville. They have six children. Presently she is married to Billy Milam, and lives in Coral Ridge, near Louisville.

LOLA MAE PARSONS married Richard Cook of Louisville. She now lives in Greeneville, Tenn. They have a son, Keith and a daughter, Kathy. Richard is deceased.

\* \* \*

Thanks especially goes to George Parsons of Beechmont and Mabel Phelps of Louisville for the valuable information contained in this article. Correspondence should be addressed to the writer, 7965 Ridgewood Road, Goodlettsville, Tenn. 37072.





**JEROME B. TUNSTILL**, who supervised the clearing of the Parsons land at Beech Creek Junction in 1922, prior to the auction. He is a cousin of Smith Tunstill who now lives in Greenville. With Mr. Tunstill is Dorothy Grady.



**ALTON PARSONS**

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**Photos courtesy of Mabel Phelps**

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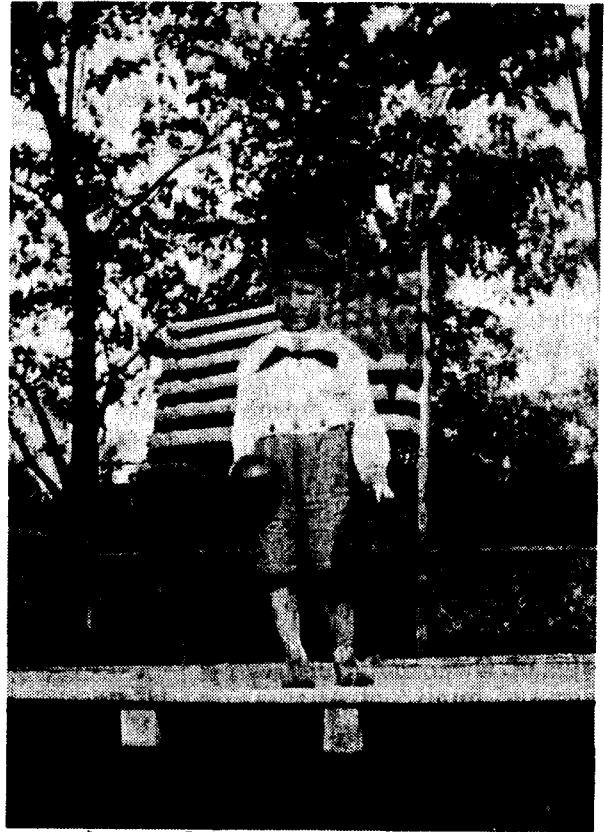
**HAMMOND PARSONS**, longtime Beechmont postmaster, showing corn he grew. This corn, probably the tallest ever grown in the area, was 14 feet tall.



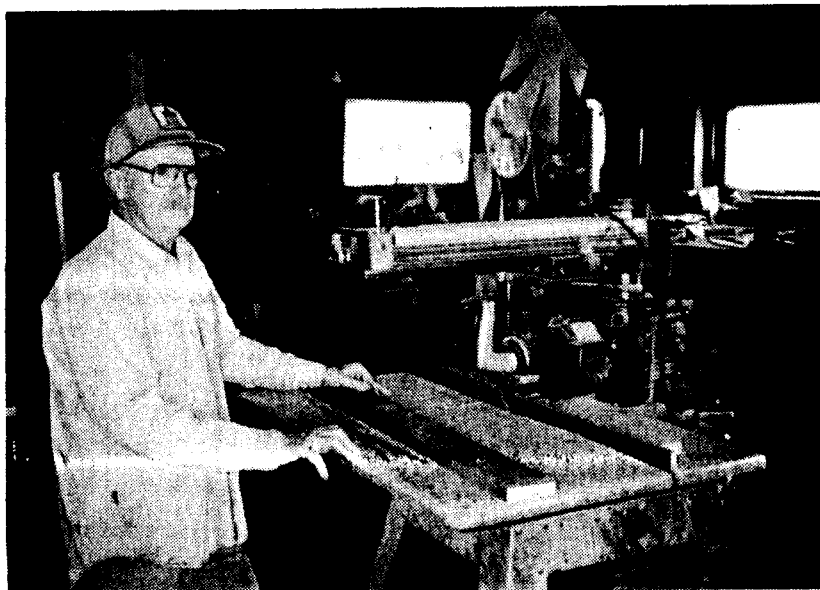




**HATTIE RUTH MAHAN**, with the original Hughes-Kirk school building in the background.



**CARLYSLE PARSONS**, on July 4, 1922, the day of the auction. He is considered by many to be Hughes-Kirk's first basketball star.



**GEORGE PARSONS**, in his shop at Beechmont.

