



MEMORIES OF MOTLEY  
KENTUCKY  
FROM OXEN TO GREENHOUSES

BY  
WAIF HOGAN MOTLEY

## MEMORIES OF MOTLEY, KENTUCKY

My father and mother, Ed and Alice Moore Hogan, were the parents of four daughters and four sons. Our home was at Meador in Allen County, Kentucky.

I was next to the youngest child. When my baby brother was born, our mother was ill for quite a long time. Our uncle and aunt, Mr. and Mrs. Jim Harman, lived close by. I visited them much of the time while Mother was ill, and after she was well. They had no children, and I was pleased with the undivided attention I got there.

From the time I was old enough to visit my uncle and aunt, I found Grandpa Harman, who lived with them (as did my cousin, Josie Harman, when she was not away at school or teaching) and Uncle Jim ready to entertain me and find excuses for any mistakes I might make. Aunt Hannie was good and kind, but firm and she was the one to hand out discipline when it was needed.

I continued to visit them even after Mother had recovered from her illness.

When Uncle Jim bought a farm in Warren County, Kentucky, from Mr. J. K. Motley, he and my aunt prevailed on my parents to let me move with them.

I hated to leave my mother and father, and my sisters and brothers, but of course I went back for visits of two or three weeks at a time. And so I had two homes, which I loved equally.

Grandpa Harman brought me down one evening, and I was awe struck when I saw the house. It was at Motley, Kentucky, and my memories are centered around that home.

It was a big two story house with a porch running across the entire width of the front at the second story level. This was enclosed with an iron fence-like rail. A similar porch across the back was enclosed with wood panels.

The builder of the house, and other improvements described later, was Mr. Matthew P. Motley. He had two sons, J. K. and L.C.J., as well as one daughter, Eugenia, who married Mr. Frank Hays. These were the maternal grandparents of Congressman William H. Natcher.

Uncle "Mac", as I have been told many people called him, must have been an industrious man--working from early until late on the farm in good weather, then on bad days putting in long hours in the blacksmith shop. In that shop he was an expert at making many things he and his neighbors needed.

His specialty must have been the farm wagon, made from start to finish. First cutting the tree and having it saved; then the frame, the hub of the wheel, the spokes, and the steel rims!

When the job was finished, all who saw or used one of the wagons, declared them to be excellent. According to what older citizens of that day have told their children, Mr. Motley was a man of many talents.

He believed in building items so strong and enduring that they would last through all years to come. I was told

that he was three years in the building of his home and only the finest yellow poplar was used. Good materials must have been used, as it is still in good condition.

With all his desires to make his work endure, he undoubtedly had some strange ideas. Across the front of the house there were three doors! When you entered the one in the center, you naturally expected to enter a hall, but you were standing in a narrow passageway with a door to your right and one to your left. Directly in front of you were steep steps from wall to wall with no rail. They looked like the Old Opera House steps. Uncle Jim later cut the steps down to one-third their width and made a hall leading to the back wing. There was a large fireplace in each of the downstairs rooms, and smaller ones in the two bedrooms upstairs. The rooms were all tightly plastered and the floors were good. Still, you could sit in front of a roaring fire with your face burning and your back freezing! There was a large wash house in the back yard. It had a huge fireplace, and I believe that the cellar below had one too. I think, just once, my uncle stripped tobacco down there.

Josie Harman, my cousin mentioned heretofore, was a grown young lady now, and was not expected to run errands to this building; which held so many of the necessary things for preparing our meals and keeping the household going. How I envied her for escaping such boring tasks. I ran back and forth a lot in the morning hours. One task was carrying the kerosene lamps to the wash house and fill them. While I did this, Aunt Hannie was cleaning the chimneys. And how they did shine!

I took the kitchen soap dish to the barrel to fill it with the lye soap that looked like sorghum molasses. It was made from the strong lye that came from the ash hopper when water ran slowly through the ashes. This lye was mixed with grease and boiled down to the right consistancy. To and from the cellar, I carried the fine cakes of butter, milk, vegetables.

In the summer Uncle Jim brought fine watermelons and stacked them in the cool. In the evenings when neighbors came in, he brought out a number to the yard and served large slices to each one. Sometimes, fortunate persons might get half a melon. He could grow the finest melons, and later in life he had a green thumb for flowers. Also his cured hams were about perfect.

In the corner of Aunt Hannie's kitchen there were two barrels. One held the snowy flour, the other, meal; sometimes still hot from the grist mill. Stands of lard were in the cellar. Sacks of sausage and hams hung in the smoke house. In front of the kitchen fireplace was the "Majestic" range. There always seemed to be a perfect spot for the big skillet of chicken to be just right. It was also great for baking biscuits as well as my aunt's wonderful tea cakes.

Wheat threshing days were memorable. Men from neighboring farms came rushing in with their wagons and teams and tried to load them as quickly with the shocks of wheat and get back to where the thresher was set; usually near the barn. They fed the wheat into the machine, and I liked to watch the golden grain pour out into bags. Later it would be taken to the mill to make

fine flour. I believe it was the secret of delicious biscuits. Sometimes 18 or 20 men were there for the noon meal. Today with such a bountiful meal as served these men it would cost a lot of money. This was all hard work, but it was such good neighborly exchange of help, and everyone took pride in doing their part. When the grain was in the barn and the men moved to the next farm, everyone was tired, but happy, over a job well done.

There was no demand for higher wages, and no strikes! But I believe you saw more smiling faces then, than now. On ordinary working days most men were called in from the fields by ringing the dinner bell.

As usual, in everything he built, Uncle "Mac" erected a rock platform in the side yard that supported the largest bell in the county. It could be heard for miles around. Mr. J. K. Motley reserved this when he sold the farm and moved it to his farm near Bowling Green. I had wondered what had become of the bell, and recently Willard Hardcastle told me his nephew now owns it.

On the opposite side of the house from the bell was a swing, which I find difficult to describe. A heavy timber ran from one tree to another. Down from this, two flexible steel straps were attached to a wide seat. I believe three or four people could be seated. It was certainly not a child's toy.

Some Sunday afternoons grown-up neighbor boys would come in to really get the most from this attraction. If small children were there they stood back, out of danger, to watch the big boys. Some time later it was toned down to one seat, and finally discarded altogether.

Patios were unheard of in those days, but bricks were laid all around the house. The ones across the front and in the wide walk to the front gate were the large square brick. There was no reason for anyone tracking mud into the house.

Election day was so interesting. Uncle Jim was usually an officer. Other officers often brought their wives that day to visit my aunt. Such a good meal was prepared, and if any children were visiting me, we were allowed to take the men's lunches to the polls. Voting was done in Barney Pearson's shop. What a thrill it was to be that much involved in that important day. Patriotism was such a part of children's lives, both at home and at school. But it was not all lily pure at the polls even then. You might hear the adults say in the evening that from all indications some vote buying may have taken place.

I attended school at Rocky Springs. One year Jessie taught there and it seemed to me that she was more strict with me than anyone else in the room. Long ago, the children from that district began riding the bus to Alvaton.

Country children may have missed some advantages that city children had, but that did not apply to our teachers. What remarkable people they were. Modern educators now see how good it is for different grades to be in one room.

Those teachers we had were not casting around trying to find out who they were. They knew! And with that knowledge and assurance we felt secure.

I attended Rocky Springs Church. I believe that it is the third oldest church in the Warren County Baptist Association.

the church and cemetery adjoining it are kept in good condition. I believe you can still see some of the unmarked stones, where the slaves were buried. So much of our social life was centered around Church and School. Dates were made to go to Church. There were hay rides and Sunday School picnics. And when the Ringling Brothers or Barnum and Baily Circus came to town, we always got to town early to see the parade. Our children and grandchildren have never seen shows equal to those they brought to town.

There was a general store at Motley, and sometimes in the evenings, we would go over to shop a little, or just visit and talk. When I was a child I remember about three different men who operated the store. When Mr. Dan Hays owned it, a young black man who worked for him would entertain us by playing the harmonica and I think sometimes the Jew's harp. When he played "The Train" you felt as if it were coming around the corner. As I remember it now, he must have been as good as those, who now receive great applause, as they perform on T.V. and radio.

Uncle Dan Hogan and Mr. Charlie Smith operated a saw mill between Motley and Green Hill. They used a yoke of oxen to snake the logs and lumber on the mill yard. Uncle Dan lived in town, so he boarded at our house during the week. Each week he brought the oxen, "Buck" and "Berry", to our barn to stable them. From a safe distance I would watch them plod toward the barn, and I thought that they were the saddest looking animals I ever saw. Recently, a friend gave me a picture of Mr. Charlie Roemer's saw mill at Motley. It was a big outfit. Many men worked for him.



... a great lumber man he was. Young men who came along later respected his judgment and knowledge and sought his advice from time to time. Back then there were great tracts of timber, while today it is quite a different story.

Our telephone system provided very little privacy, as it was all party lines. One mother was heard to say that her daughter had such a severe earache that she could not eavesdrop all morning.

We were on Rural Route #2. I remember three of the mail carriers: Mr. Moyer, Mrs. W. J. Craig, and Bob Drake. If you lived some distance from your box, as we did, you could wrap your money in a piece of paper for stamps. I never remember anything being taken from the box. Doors were not locked. What a task it would have been to lock one of those old country homes. I believe that the lovely one that I went to live in when I married had eleven outside doors. Just think of what it would cost now to duplicate such an outlay of all materials.

I have lived in old homes and in modern ones, but there is a charm in the old that the new ones lack. I have always enjoyed being able to drive a nail in a wall of an old home any where I wanted to! Of course, sometimes you might hear the old plaster giving way under your hammer.

There were no traffic jams on the county roads when I was growing up. A young man could drive his well trained horse to see his girl on Sunday evening, and on his way home, if he secured the lines to the buggy, he could then go to sleep, knowing his horse would go straight home. This all seems un-

believable now; there have been so many fantastic changes in the time that I have lived. Just think, I saw all these slow moving events, and then to sit before the T.V. and see men walking on the moon!

I am thinking of the families that made up the Motley Community when I was a child--Harman, Stamps, Stice, Moulder, Reynolds, Roemer, Fitzpatrick, Sears, Gentry, Brunson, Hays, Pearson, Claypool and Morpew. They are all gone - at least the heads of these families. Of course they have children scattered far and near. I am sure they could add to these memories, but none with more affection than I.

Mr. Matthew P. Motley was a great, great uncle of my children. As they pause in their busy lives to read this little story of mine, I hope they will be reminded of other men and women in their background.

Of course, Barbara, Bob and Joe know of the dream of their father which he had when a very young man. As he looked at the timber about him, he saw the trees being taken step by step into good materials for buildings of strength and beauty.

He did that very thing. His lumber and building material business was recognized as one of the best, in this, and surrounding areas.

Then there were aunts and uncles and grandparents. Good farmers and homemakers, careful carpenters, and one skilled plasterer. All men and women of integrity and their work lives after them.

Mr. and Mrs. James Potter live in the old home now and keep the house in good condition. They have a thriving business there with their son, John. I hope one day to visit the old home. When I go back, I will add a postscript to this paper.

June 5, 1975

Today I went back. The house looks much the same, but the large shade trees surprised me. Their size reminded me of how long it had been since I was a girl there.

Down in the field, back of the house, where so often I went in the evening to drive in the cows, stand the green houses! Young John Michael Potter is doing so well with his business. He has thousands of flower and vegetable plants. I wanted a souvenir from the farm, so I bought a tear drop fern.

Before I went today, I thought I would visit the cemetery on the farm while I was there, but when I looked across the high grass and grain that one would have to wade through, I gave up on trying it. Mr. Matthew Motley worked long and hard making his burying place secure and lasting. He put up a strong iron fence with the corner posts embedded in rock. There were nice monuments for him, for his wife, and her parents. But they told me today that those corner stones were crumbling as are some of the grave stones, and that the fence may later topple.

I rarely ever see anything about Motley in the paper. The voting place is now at Green Hill. So I felt that I wanted to jot down some things about it before it is practically off the map.

This has been a pleasant day and a fitting time to close my "MEMORIES OF MOTLEY".

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