

“Father Carried a Gun Under His Coat”

A Talk With Norma Mae (Sitz) Stocker

Written by Jackie Layne Partin

About 1957 in my sophomore Grundy County High School home economics class directed by teacher, Nancy Sterling, (*later Austin*), we had a “Lemon Day.” I agreed to let each girl in the class state her opinion of me, and I was not to get angry, but I was to use the comments, good or bad, to help build the character I wanted to be. Everyone chose to participate by making the same agreement as I had. The episode turned out to be an eye opener for some, but I already knew what was coming my way. I was not rocked back on my heels by what I heard. “You talk too much and too loudly; you try to control everyone; you always want to be the leader, and you think you know everything!” Yep, that group of girls really had it right that day! On June 16, 2009 on Stocker Road, off Highway 399, I met “my match”—and I mean this in a nice kind of a way because after all, I’m a nice person in a nice kind of a way. And “my match” is a wonderful character whom I adore.



Norma Mae Sitz age (4)—1919



Norma Mae Sitz (ca. 1925)



Norma Mae Sitz at High School Graduation (1933)

Norma Mae Sitz was born at home on 24 April 1915, making her ninety-four years of age now. Her parents lived in White City, a little place between Tracy City and the Oak Grove community. William Edward Sitz (1890-1961) and Margie Lee (Fletcher) Sitz (1890-1989) hatched only one little chicken in their nest, and they lovingly named her Norma Mae. Which one of the two doctors in town, Dr.

Douglas Hayes or Dr. William D. Barnes, helped with the delivery, wasn't important; she was just happy to be born into a loving family.

Her paternal grandparents were Albert Ebenhanna Sitz (1871-1940) and Martha "Mattie" Lawrence (Smith) Sitz (1873-1943). They were born in Grundy County and lived here until they moved to Kentucky to work the coalmines. Both died in Covington, Kenton County, Kentucky, but are buried at Oak Grove Cemetery in White City. One of Mattie's sisters was Gertrude "Gertie" (Smith) Sanders who was Herman and Howard Sanders' mother; she and her family lived in Summerfield. Another sister was Bessie Smith who married Ed Hunt. (*Ed, Bessie and their daughter Irene are in one of the large family photos at the end of the story, "Hence Layne's Pig Just Dropped Dead," which can be read on the following site: www.grundycountyhistory.org/*). Norma's maternal grandparents were Jarvis Miller Fletcher (1860-1952) and Mary Caroline (Young) Fletcher (1866-1946). They both were born in Tennessee, lived in White City, and are buried in the Tracy City Cemetery. Now I don't know which one of these lines passed down the gene for good memory to Norma, but she is ever so sharp with remembering names, dates and happenings. She quickly put me to shame, and rarely in the course of our talk did she have to think about anything. The information just rolled out of her mouth.

Some noticeably strong traits exhibited by Norma during our talk were that she doesn't mind interrupting you in the middle of a sentence (*neither do I*); she doesn't mind setting the record straight (*neither do I*), and she doesn't want anyone doing her thinking or talking for her (*neither do I*). Good for her! And she loves to talk; she is so full of information that her mind unloads it so fast onto the person to whom she is speaking, that it is virtually impossible to take it all in. Now that you have met spunky, spry, and spirited Norma Mae (Sitz) Stocker, let's tell her story.



Front row: Bessie with doll; Jarvis Miller Fletcher; Mary Caroline (Young) Fletcher; Reece;
Back row: Charles Marion, Margie Lee (Norma's mother);
Virgie and Eunice



Jarvis Miller Fletcher and wife Mary Caroline (Young) Fletcher in front of their house in White City



The Sitz Family at home in White City: Front row L to R: Josie, Virgil in wagon, Frank holding goat, William Edward, Albert Ebenhanna with horse; second row: Clara, Nora, William Jackson and Elizabeth; on porch Martha Lawrence (Smith) Sitz and Katie



Back: Margie, Robert and Millie Sitz
Front: Mattie, Freda and Myrtle Sitz

For the first eight years of her life, she lived in the Myers Hill community of White City. She reckons that the hill got its name from Wrenn and Mary Myers who lived at the foot of the hill on the right. I asked her where White City got its name. She answered quickly with her thoughts on the subject, "William 'Uncle Bill' Sitz and his wife Bettie (Dishroon) Sitz, (*Norma's great-grandparents*), painted their house white which was unusual for those days. He had overestimated the amount of paint that was needed and had a lot of paint left over. He went across the road where his barn stood and painted it white, but he still had extra paint. Uncle Bill's place was close to the dirt road that crossed the railroad tracks. At that location the miners had built a little shed to protect themselves from the elements while waiting to board the train going to the Pryor Ridge mines. Uncle Bill also painted the miners' shed white. The miners had a great sense of humor, so they poked fun at Uncle Bill by saying that their white shed was located in 'White City.'"

Besides the Myers families, other neighbors scattered around the hill were Mrs. Grace Bryant, widow of Samuel, and their children, the Jim Manley family, the Joe and Della (Ponder) Speegle family, and a host of others. Uncle Joe and Aunt Lucinda Siegler lived at the foot of the hill, and their grandchildren Elsie, James and Frances London lived with them. Elsie married Jay Speegle in 1923; she became one of Norma's grade school teachers. Those active little children around the hill got their formal education up on top of the hill at the Myers Hill School, which was on the very spot that the second Myers Hill Church sat. The earlier generation went to the same school, but it was then called the Colyar School. There had been several Colyars in Tracy City for whom the school could have been named, but Norma thought the right one was the man who owned a large piece of land in the White City area that was

often called the Colyar farm. The Colyar home sat behind the school but on the other side of the railroad tracks. The sidetracks ran beside their house. The school sat a “little north” of the first of three Myers Hill Methodist Church buildings.

Mrs. Grace Bryant taught first grade when Norma started school. Some of her little friends were Ophelia Cannon, Virginia Kelley, Hellon O’Neal, Ruby Haynes and Lois Way who had a twin brother, Louis. Norma disliked boys; she didn’t want to have anything to do with them. Don’t all we girls say that at first? I wonder what makes us change our minds in later years! When the Grundy County school system reworked its student numbers, the old Colyar School/Myers Hill School was eliminated, and the Myers Hill Church bought the land and building and moved on up on the top of the hill. They met in the empty school for a time before it was torn asunder; soon they moved into their new building. That building, with the exception of its fellowship hall, is now gone since a new third meeting place was built across the road and around the hill a little.



Colyar School later called Myers Hill School



Jarvis M. Fletcher (left) holding “Rover” and neighbor Jerry M. Ponder

Jerry and Mary Ponder were neighbors to William and Margie Lee Sitz. Norma’s great-grandparents, William Jackson Sitz and Elizabeth Ann Frances (Dishroon) Sitz, or for short, “Uncle Bill and Aunt Bettie”, as they were known to the community, lived just off the old dirt road going out to White City. Right behind Uncle Bill’s garden was a dirt road that came around the garden right on passed the Ponders’ house; it then traveled on passed Norma’s parent’s house which was facing the original house that her grandparents, Albert and Mattie Sitz built when “they went to housekeeping.” Alton and Clara (Bryant) Myers were living in her grandparents’ old house when Norma was a child.

Back then Norma explained, “There were only two ways to get to town on foot—walk the old wagon road or walk the railroad.” She and her mother, Margie, usually chose to walk the railroad and stay out of the bumpy, often muddy road. Walking the railroad tracks is an event that all children and adults should experience at least once in their lives. Everyone had to choose the stride that was best for easy advancement. Well-balanced folks, usually the children, were good at staying on the rails and actually

placing one foot in front of the other without falling off; then there were those who walked the crossties—they usually had little tiny strides for stepping on one crosstie at a time, or awful long legs to advance two crossties in one step; then there were those who walked alongside the tracks on the crunchy, cooled cinders. If the readers haven't tried it for a mile, go out and experience it, but watch out for the train! "Where the Depot was, was what we called 'Town'," Norma said. Amused, she announced, "Why, we even had a New York Store, and I remember about this one store where furniture was sold in the front, and the undertaker was in the back!" The store she spoke of was the E. C. Norvell Store on Railroad Avenue. He was also the undertaker for many miles around. Norma was still younger than eight years, but she remembers the two Flury Stores. Henry and Victor each had a store in Tracy City, but her mother did her grocery shopping at the Henry Flury Store. She spoke of the Goodman Café, but the Goodman children she remembers the most were those of Edward and Maude Goodman, especially Edith and her brother Doug. Another Goodman friend was Emily Goodman, daughter of William and Myrtle Goodman from Pelham Valley. One person she often saw on her outings with her mother was Mr. Jerome Bouldin, the mailman. His horse ambled along the old dirt roads in the communities pulling the little buggy and its much-looked-forward-to cargo from house to house—the mail must go through! Mr. Bouldin generally took the mail to the county line, but maybe he also went a little further to some households.

One of Norma's favorite places to visit while she and her mother were in town was "The Ice Cream Parlor" which stood on the corner where the Annex Café is now. These visits would have taken place between 1915 and 1923. Of course, the original building was destroyed by fire in 1935 and rebuilt the same year. Her memory tells her that there were large glass windows on both sides of the corner of the building, and the tables were glass top with wrought iron chairs. She recalls being able to watch the bank patrons go in and out the bank entrance while she ate her ice cream. Although she doesn't recall who operated The Ice Cream Parlor, she emphatically states that there were no alcoholic beverages, or such like, sold in that little establishment—in her own words, "They only sold ice cream!" (*The Flanagan family may have been the ones who operated the business.*)

Norma remembers that she was such a tiny little girl that her mother took her to Dr. Lear in Sewanee who gave her a bottle with the dreaded "crossbones and skull" on the outside. Whatever it was, it did make her gain weight. Maybe she should have visited The Ice Cream Parlor more often. That would have put some pounds on her. On her walks to and from town she often saw Wilburn Fults, a local photographer who carried his camera everywhere taking pictures. James Thomas "Tinker Tom" Anderson was a man she remembered for his ability to fix clocks. That is where he got his name—"tinker"ing with all kinds of little machines. He, too, was a photographer. Left is a photograph taken by Tinker Tom Anderson. The man in the photo is probably someone in the Anderegg or Stocker family.



Norma was a coalminer's daughter. William Edward Sitz walked every day from White City to the Tracy City Depot to catch the train for the twenty-mile ride to the Palmer mines. He worked hard all day in the dirty, stuffy coalmines; then at the end of his shift, he caught the train for his twenty-mile ride back to Tracy City. The train rides were not free for coalminers. William had to pay but at a cheaper rate. There were no bathhouses at Palmer at the time, so the miners had to have their own coach in order to keep the coal dust off the other passengers. For convenience sake, William and Margie decided to move away from White City and start life over in the Collins area. This would make William's workday a little more bearable. The Myers Hill School had closed its doors early for the season, and Norma had finished the third grade, so on 01 February 1924, while still eight-years-old, Norma left all her friends and relatives behind at Myers Hill and moved out to Camp Four in Collins.

As the railroad tracks were laid down to Palmer, camps were set up along the way and numbered. Camp Four was the last camp before they reached Palmer. The name "Collins" was written over the Depot entrance, and there was a Collins family who lived "over in the field" for whom the area was possibly named, but she wasn't certain about that. Palmer was a "boom" town. Laborers could not keep enough lumber cut to build the houses that were going up everywhere. The mines were in need of all kinds of timbers, and the railroads were constantly in need of timber for crossties and rail cars. Railroading and logging were two inseparable enterprises of the day. There certainly was work in the Palmer area at the time if one wanted to work.

William never rented Company housing, but managed to buy a house for his small family. (*The house sat where the present day (2009) Scott's Grocery is.*) The house, which was about ten-years-old and had been built by Joe Creighton, was about a mile from Collins and a mile from Tatesville. It was a boxed-in house, and William and Margie worked to put a weatherboard exterior on it and build a screened-in back porch. (*William died in 1961, but Margie continued to live in the house until 1974 when she moved closer to her daughter and grandchildren over in Sequatchie County.*)

The schools around Camp Four still had six more weeks to continue before the summer break, so Margie wanted Norma to go back to school and get acquainted with the children and families in the Palmer area. John Goforth and his daughter, Veola (Goforth) Heard, who had only been married for a few months, were two of the teachers. They lived in Tracy City and rode the train to Palmer each day. Norma walked a mile to catch the first of two trains to Palmer and then rode two miles to school. Originally the old Palmer School was to be a hotel, but a school was needed more, so the hotel became a school. As the train rolled in on top of one hill, Norma stepped off and reluctantly walked across the swinging bridge that crossed the muddy road below, and she ended up on the hill where the school sat. As a small child she was afraid of the height and movement of the bridge, so Mrs. Veola held her hand as they walked across. While on the train, the engineer, conductor and brakemen were "the grandest things" to her. They were just like home folks. Her parents had bought her a little book of tickets for her rides to and from school. Mrs. Veola kept the little book for her during the day for fear she would lose it before the end of the school day. Another teacher who came to mind was a Mrs. Holmes who was a member of the Seventh Day Adventist Church. Norma believes that there were two Holmes brothers

who operated a sawmill in the area, but lived out of the county. She thought that the teacher was one of their wives. Another name, Mildred Geary, came to mind, but she wasn't certain what job she did since Norma was only there six weeks. She did have time to make friends with Gladys Brown, sister of Harvey Brown, and Katherine and Louise Hege.

The Coal Company rented Company houses to the miners. One could rent two, three or four rooms with the rates assigned accordingly. By April, trouble was brewing at the mines. Walter Nolan who was married to Norma's aunt, Eunice Ella Fletcher, was President of the United Mine Workers. On the first day of April 1924, the miners came out on the biggest strike they had ever undertaken. William Edward Sitz would not have made the move from White City at that time had he known a strike was in the immediate future. Thinking back, Norma thinks the Union gave the miners ten dollars a month, but she wasn't certain about the amount. The Company forced them out of the Company housing since the strikers couldn't pay the rent. Many left looking for work elsewhere leaving Palmer looking much like a ghost town. Thankfully, William and Margie owned their own house, so they did not have to move.



William and Margie Sitz's house near Tatesville



Walter Nolan and wife Eunice Ella (Fletcher)
Nolan with children Ruth and Dewey

Walter Nolan vacated his office as President of the United Mine Workers and moved to Illinois out of fear for his life and those of his family, and with a wife and five children at the time, he needed to find work quickly. Norma's father was soon talked into taking on the challenge that his sister-in-law's husband once tried. As President, William began to be threatened. He asked and got permission from the county law to carry a gun. Softly, Norma said, "Father carried a gun under his coat." Seeing him place the weapon on his body each morning always frightened young Norma. She never knew if someday her father might be killed. There were lots of quarreling, arguing and fighting, but Norma doesn't remember anyone getting killed during the squabbles.

That autumn Norma changed from Palmer School to Tatesville School. Since it was just a mile down the road, the family stayed put in the same house. Now Norma could learn new places of business and new people. On the way to Tatesville there were three stores; the first store was Mr. Coleman Shelton's, then Mr. Bill Bouldin's and then Mr. John Creighton's store. About a mile and a half from

Creighton's Store, twice a week, Margie and Norma got on the railroad tracks and walked to Palmer where they picked up their mail. William went passed the post office twice a day, but in the mornings it wasn't opened when he got off the train, and when he met the train for his ride home in the evening, it was closed. At Camp Four in Collins, Emma Nunley took orders for Gordon Northcutt's Store. One could buy anything that was needed included animal feed at that store.

Norma walked the mile to Tatesville School each day. The first Tatesville School was just two rooms with Irene Abernathy, daughter of Zeddie and Dixie Abernathy of Tracy City, and Grace (Cox) Brown as teachers. Grace was the new bride of Carl David Brown. Her sister, Stella Cox, was also a teacher in the county. Stella and Grace's father, Lynn Jackson Cox, operated a store in Tracy City and lived somewhere near the Creighton Chevrolet corner. Lynn Cox was a brother to my great-grandmother Rebecca Jane (Cox) Layne of Laynes' Cove, which made me familiar with the names of the teachers Norma was remembering.

William Sitz was still a Union man to the Company, so they would not give him a job. He worked one summer loading staves from a wagon into a railroad car. Dave Smith owned the stove mill somewhere out in the Savage Gulf area. The lumber and stove mill companies built little shacks for the workers, and then when all the timber was gone, they'd move to another spot and build more little shacks. The woods around Savage Gulf were full of little shacks until they all rotted and fell.

"Norma, since you were an only child, you probably had no chores to do." I stated. She said, "Oh, you are wrong there!" In order to help her husband support the family, Margie Sitz kept chickens, and she assigned Norma the job of feeding them at night and gathering the eggs. Margie had eggs year around when other folks' chickens stopped laying in the cold weather. Norma contributed the winter egg gatherings to the special care she and her mother gave to the chickens during cold weather. After Margie cooked and served the evening meal, she let the old cook stove cool down, but not get cold. Norma brought in a pan of corn and put it in the oven to warm it. While it was warming, she then took the potato peels and diced them up into little pieces and mixed them with the warm corn. Margie always bought good chicken feed and sometimes slipped a little of the cow's "shorts" into the feed. Norma did not remember there being such a thing as "laying mash." Curious about the price of eggs then as compared to today, I asked, "How much did your mother get for a dozen eggs?" "She got a quarter a dozen," she answered with excitement. Her mother could take three dozens of eggs to the store and exchange them for the prettiest "print" fabric. Three yards would make Norma a beautiful dress. Unlike myself, and many other older women that I have spoken with, Norma could not remember ever having a dress made out of feed sack fabric.

Margie Sitz always packed her daughter some kind of good meat and biscuits for lunch each day. At this point in our conversation, Norma bubbled over with laughter saying, "Cheese and crackers; cheese and crackers! I had so much cheese and crackers in my lunch that I never wanted to see them again! My mother would go to the store and ask for cheese and crackers, and the merchant would go down into the barrel filled with crackers and grasp all his hand could hold. He then weighed them and put them in a

bag. He had sliced so many slices of cheese from the hoop that he could slice one pound correctly without even weighing it.”

Norma finished fourth grade under Miss Abernathy and Mrs. Brown, but the next year Henry Barker was the principal, and his wife, Edna (Wimberly) Barker, was the other teacher. While Norma was in Tatesville School, the Barkers’ daughter Ruth was one of her friends. She had a younger brother, Henry, Jr., who was too young to be in school, but since his parents both taught there, he had to tag along too. Henry, Sr. carried his little son around his neck on his shoulders as the family made the walk to school just like the other students. Norma struggled with her fractions in math, and Mr. Barker worked with her helping her as much as he could. When he told her to take the problems home with her and work on them, with very little confidence she said, “I’ll try.” Speaking gently to her, he said, “That’s all an angel can do!” She finished fifth grade in Tatesville; then the family moved to Drakesboro in Muhlenburg County, Kentucky, where her Sitz grandparents and Uncle Virgil Sitz had already moved. Her grandfather and uncle were working in the mines, so William was also able to get a job there. There were no unions in the mines in Drakesboro. Mr. Bridges and Mr. Jones owned the mines, and the black men worked right along side the white men. They had separate churches and schools, but they lived in as good a housing as their white counterparts. They did not live in Company housing either; many owned their own homes. Norma remembers healthy relationships at the mines between the two races. Her mother bought some of the best buttermilk ever from a black woman who lived near.

It wasn’t long until Norma’s grandfather, Albert Sitz, while working the mines in Kentucky, was injured severely when a portion of the roof fell in, crushing his leg from his hip to his knee. He was taken north by train to Owensboro Hospital where the doctors fixed his leg well enough, after it healed, for him to hobble around. William and Margie stayed in Drakesboro for a year. Then they decided to come back to Palmer hoping that William might again get a job at the mines; the grandparents stayed in Kentucky. Norma had finished the sixth grade in the Baptist Church building in Owensboro since the school had burned before she moved to Drakesboro.

Now back in Grundy County and back in their old house, which had been rented while they were gone, William set about putting out a garden and planting a cornfield. Norma started the seventh grade that fall at Tatesville School and made two new friends, Mary and Almeta Stocker from over in Sequatchie County. It was so far for them to come to school that their parents paid for them to room and board in Tatesville. They had an older brother named Alfred Lewis Stocker with whom Norma became acquainted. Amanda Barker, Henry’s sister, was Norma’s seventh grade teacher. Henry had moved to Tarlton the year Norma was in Kentucky. His wife Edna had a teaching position there at the school, so when another teacher was needed, Henry took the job. However, William was unable to get a job at the coalmines because of his union affiliation, so the family moved again. In 1929 with the Great Depression upon them, they moved back to Drakesboro where Norma entered the eighth grade in 1930. In that year there was an explosion in the mines in Drakesboro that killed six men. Concerned and bothered by the sadness rendered upon the dead miners’ families, William and his brother Virgil decided to move back home to Grundy County. When Norma reentered eighth grade, but at Tatesville, Herbert Todd Nance, a Web School graduate, was her teacher.

In the fall of 1930, Norma started high school at the two-year-old Grundy County High School building in Tracy City. The first school bus she rode was an old, Dutch Maid Bakery truck driven by Mr. Pat Patterson. The bread truck was so cold for the students, but the second bus, which was bigger and built specifically for a school bus, was just as cold. Its design was simply a wooden box on a frame. Bud Flynn drove that bus. Later Crandel McNabb, who was a student, started driving the bus. This is where Norma reminded me that the children back then were older when they were in High School, so Crandel could do the driving. It took longer to work one's way up to the High School level. Norma caught the bus on the corner where Laynes Funeral Home is today (2009). If someone wanted to go to the back of the bus and sit, everyone had to stand up and let the person work his/her way through the group to the back seat since there was no aisle. Some of the students who rode the bus with Norma were Dola Schild, Helen Brown, Katherine and Louise Hege, Martha Hampton, Sarah Swann, two Patrick sisters, Frances and Christine, and one of their cousins, Lena Grace Patrick. Allen McCormick was her principal. The English teachers during her first year were Mildred Henderson, who also taught Latin, and a Smith girl whose name may have been Mary. Essie Rich and Lois McAlister came the next year to replace Henderson and Smith. Mr. Holley was the agriculture teacher, and Stella Cox was the home economics teacher.



The picture at the left shows the original Grundy County High School that was built in 1928 where the John A. Anderson football field is now. Norma remembers that they had to climb steps up a hill to get to the gymnasium, but they still had to go down a hill to get to town. It seemed that in those days the students were allowed to venture to town on errands. After the school burned in 1935, it was rebuilt on the western side of the gymnasium. Once cleared of the old burned school rubbish, the land became the football field.

Norma didn't like math, but her mother did, so she pushed her daughter into more math than anyone else. Norma had first and second year algebra and geometry in high school, and she thought that was too much. Allen McCormick and John Anderson taught math the first year, but Mr. Rudolph Schild later became her math teacher, and even though she was so afraid of him, she loved him as a teacher. I knew exactly what she was speaking about because I took first and second year algebra, plane geometry, solid geometry and trigonometry in high school. One of my math teachers was Miss Anna Mary Parker; she was my favorite teacher of all times, but I was so afraid of her. She scared me to death when she entered the classroom. She undoubtedly was determined to fill the shoes of Rudolph Schild. Norma said he would get angry with someone, and the class didn't know with whom he was upset. He would push the seats around in anger while using a few choice words. "**Bless his heart,**" Norma said to me. Thankfully, my teacher, Miss Anna Mary Parker never pushed the seats around or used "choice words"

on us, but she controlled us with her eyes and presence. When I heard her coming down the hall, (*she had a distinct step*), my heart began to race and pound louder and louder as though it would jump from my chest—but I learned my math subjects. Unlike Norma’s words about Mr. Schild, I certainly never thought of Miss Anna Mary by saying, “**Bless her heart,**” but I often thought, “**Bless my heart!**”

Norma and Josie Hargis ran the library their last two years of high school. There were two different rooms of library books. Although a year older than Norma, Opal Hobbs was her “best friend in all the world!” Don’t we all have one of those, or at least need one! Opal later married Jesse James. To this day (2009), Norma and Opal are still like schoolgirls on the telephone; they laugh and giggle and talk about old times and new times. Opal will always have a special place in Norma’s heart.

At first Norma studied all the time and had no time for boys, but all that changed during her junior year in high school when she started dating Alfred Lewis Stocker, an old friend from several years back. He was nine years her senior, but that didn’t matter to Norma. Alfred was reared over at the headwaters of the Collins River on the old Sterling Savage farm in Sequatchie County. That area and the farm were in Grundy County between 1844 and 1857. Alfred came from a long line of Swiss ancestors. His grandparents, Joseph and Maria (Ackermann) Stocker came over as newlyweds with the original group of Swiss immigrants in 1869. Their surname used to be spelled “Stoker,” but to spell it correctly that way, at least in the German language, it must have two dots placed over the “o” in Stoker. It was so much easier to include the “c” than to stop and put two dots over the “o,” thus the two different spellings. His father, Joseph Jacob Stocker, married Katie Katherine Anderegg from over in Tracy City where their three sons, Joseph Albert, Edward and Alfred were born. The Andereggs were also of Swiss heritage, and they were known for their meat markets. Norma remembered her father, William Sitz, telling her that as a young boy, his mother would send him to Tracy City to buy meat from the Anderegg Market.



Katie Katherine (Anderegg) Stocker



Joseph Jacob Stocker

What we know today of Savage Gulf does not usually allow our thoughts to go beyond the ranger station off Highway 399, but the Savage land actually extended across Highway 399, which was not even in existence at the time, and on up where three creeks came together to form the headwaters of the Collins River. As those waters merged and came down through the Sterling Savage land, it became known as Savage Creek, which makes its way down the mountain through more former Savage land now called Savage Gulf. It goes underground appearing from time to time as it flows toward the Tarlton Valley. Sterling Savage and his descendants poured their efforts into raising apple trees to make apple brandy. Their huge “still works” were down on the Savage Creek not too far from the family spring. Sterling started his farm back in the 1820’s, and he “gobbled up” thousands of acres of land all around his farm, some without ever having paid a cent of taxes. It was not uncommon to see a farm with the initials “GTT” (*Gone To Texas*) written on the door of the old farmhouse. This usually meant that anyone who wanted to pay the taxes could have the place. Sterling built his empire only to hand it off to his descendants until the original farm came down to the last Savage descendant to live on it, his granddaughter, Angeline (Savage) King, a daughter of Samuel Pope Savage, Sr.



Katie (Anderegg) Stocker’s Stove



Left: Ralph Thompson and Russell Stocker Talk Maps



Savage Creek below the family spring where the apple brandy was legally distilled



Remains of Sterling Savage Family spring

The Savage family may have been makers of great, legal brandy wine, but they also claimed Christianity. In August 1825, Sterling Savage asked the "Head of Collins River Church," (*Baptist*), located in the valley near Shiloh in Warren County, to hold church services on the mountain. The first service was held near Sterling Savage's place on the second Saturday in September 1825, and continued for many years. Religion rounded out the Savage farm area as a hub for just about anything that was happening for miles around.

Then the John Boyd family bought the old farm and tried their hand at raising cattle there. They built a huge house close to the Savage spring. The old Boyd house was designed with four huge rooms, each sixteen feet by twenty-two feet, two downstairs and two upstairs. The house had an ell that was sixteen feet by twenty-four feet which was used for a kitchen and dining room. John Boyd and his family had lived in one of the original Savage cabins, just a small aging structure, until they finished their own home. Later, the Boyds began to lose their livestock due to a certain, abundant plant with poisonous seeds. The discovery that the plant was in great demand led the Boyds to plant nursery stock and start the "Ornamental Nursery Business." A decision was made to move onto larger farms in Warren County where they were instrumental in starting the nursery business in that area. (*Warren County Heritage Book*) In 1908, they sold their farm to Joe and Kate Stocker.

The Stockers with their three sons settled into their new home and began improvements on it immediately. They put weatherboarding over the boxed exterior walls and added two more rooms to the already large house. Soon their two daughters, Mary and Almata were born. Now it was the Stocker family's time to make history on those rolling hills and along side that beautiful creek that took on a life of its own. Work, work, work, was the order of the day. The women had their chores, and the men forced the farm to produce the living for the family. What an excellent place to rear children! I recently sat in a car high atop the old farm and watched a flock of wild turkeys prance across one of the old fields near the old stage line. The farm was just what the young Stocker boys needed at that time in their lives.



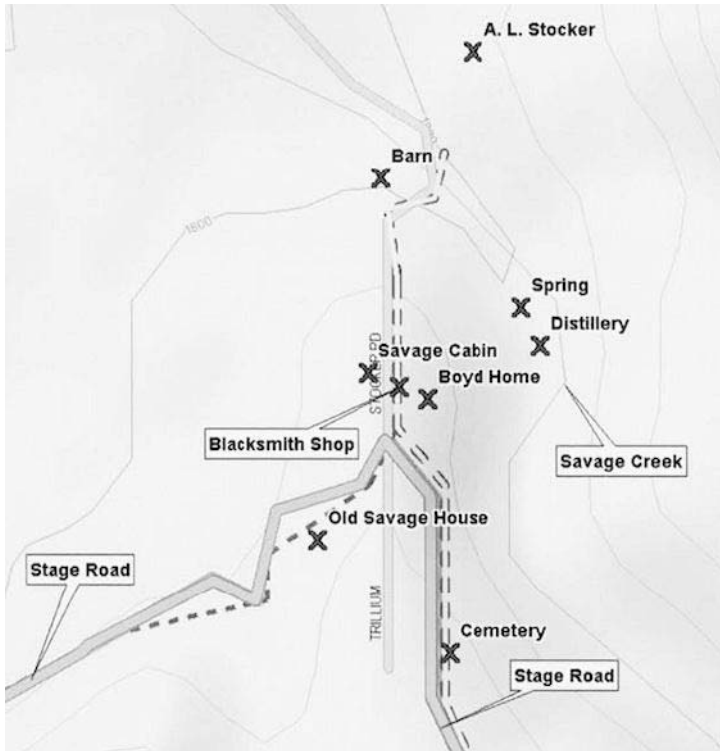
Earl Cook and Opal Hobbs



Alfred L. Stocker and Norma Sitz



Joseph Jacob Stocker, Sr
(Alfred had killed the turkey.)



A 2009 GPS map of the Sterling Savage Farm

	GPS	
Spring	N35 25.681	W85 30.608
Distillery	N35 25.664	W85 30.598
Savage Cabin	N35 25.651	W85 30.692
Blacksmith	N35 25.645	W85 30.675
Boyd Home	N35 25.640	W85 30.660
Old Savage	N35 25.577	W85 30.721
Cemetery	N35 25.526	W85 30.648
A. L. Stocker	N35 25.796	W85 30.635

Not Shown on Map

Brit House	N35 25.877	W85 31.665
Mansfield House	N35 25.220	W85 30.478

(Thanks to Russell Stocker for his assistance)

Joseph Albert had built his family a home higher up on the hill above his parents' house, the Boyd house, and his brother Edward, in 1928, had crossed the Savage Creek on the farm and built a house for his family. In 1933 Joe and Katie Stocker and their two daughters moved to Palmer and started a grocery business. That left Alfred living alone in the big house, but he loved farming, and he was where he wanted to be. After Norma's graduation from high school in the spring of 1934, she continued her courtship with Alfred. On August 11, 1934, she married Alfred Lewis Stocker with Rev. M. C. Hampton officiating. The ceremony took place at the Palmer Nazarene Church parsonage. They married on Saturday and moved into Alfred's big house as a young married couple on the following Monday. From the beginning, Norma loved the farm and the big house; she also loved her mother-in-law Katie Katherine just as though she were her second mother. She had nothing but praises for the hard-working, versatile Katie. Norma remembers that the little ancient Sterling Savage house was still barely standing and fell down a little later after her move to the farm. Joe Stocker and his sons had built a blacksmith shop close to the little shack. The farm as a whole was left to the three brothers to divide as they saw fit, and they did just that.

On May 23, 1935, Norma gave birth to her first son Donald Ray Stocker. She had gone over to Palmer to give birth at her mother-in-law's house where she would be closer to a doctor. She said that she always called her in-laws "Mr. and Mrs. Stocker" until little Don started calling them the same. She then changed and called them "Grandma and Grandpa" after that. On December 07, 1937, Norma gave birth, again at the in-laws' house, to twin boys, James Earl and Jarvis "Murl" (*Norma's spelling*). Baby

Jarvis lived only two days and was buried at Fall Creek Cemetery. Both twins were born clubfooted, and James had to have his feet straightened. It was seven years before Alfred and Norma were blessed with a third son, Russell, who was born on May 02, 1944. He was born at the Dr. Oscar Howell Clements Clinic in Palmer. When Russell was a baby, Norma got a terrible toothache, and her father took her to Dr. Thomas Roberts in Tracy City for an extraction. She left her baby and father in the car, and up those wooden steps she went with all confidence that she would survive what lay ahead. (*I personally re-walked those stairs recently and shivered with thoughts of the pain I had suffered in that dentist office. Many folks have horrible memories of going up those stairs knowing that they were just about to be tortured. No wonder so many of us older folks have no teeth in certain areas of our mouths—Dr. Tom Roberts collected them for fun.*) Norma said that her pain was so bad that she passed out completely. When she awoke, Dr. Tom and his helper had her up on her feet trying to get her to walk around. The usual charge was one dollar per extraction, but if one had a baby tooth pulled, it might only be fifty cents.

As stated before, Alfred and Norma were living on a historical piece of land. At the back of the large Boyd house, now Stocker house, further up the hill was the Savage Cemetery. It had grown up and did not even have a fence around it to keep the cattle out when Norma and Alfred moved into the big house. Soon members of the Savage families began to drift by looking for their loved ones' burial place. They, along with Alfred's help, began to clean and fence the cemetery. Those persons' names believed to be buried in the little cemetery were put on one large stone and placed at the entrance. One of the old stage roads goes in front of the cemetery and then splits. At one time, the area of the Savage farm had a store and a post office. It was called Gage, Tennessee. The spelling was a little off, for it was actually Gauge, Tennessee. It was there that the government *gauge* for measuring or "proofing" the alcoholic content in homemade brews, was available. The actual post office sign is still hanging around in a private collection. A school, which had a good number in attendance, was built there before Joe and Kate Stocker bought the farm. The land seemed to be a hub for several roads and activities.



The old post office sign from the porch of the Boyd House.
This was the only part of the house that had weatherboarding on it at the time.

Living on their side of Savage Creek presented problems for Alfred and Norma when it came to getting their sons to school. Often the creek flooded covering the bridge that they needed to cross.

Norma had worked on school subjects with her eldest son Don so much that he finally was put in the third grade almost from the beginning. James also attended school at Freedonia at first. A teacher, Fred Land who lived in Freedonia began teaching at Collins, so he graciously allowed Don and James to ride to school at Collins with him. Later, it became necessary for the boys to go to Collins and stay with their Sitz grandparents so that they could attend school. Alfred and Norma took them on Sunday afternoon to their grandparents and picked them up on Wednesday afternoons. The next morning, they took them back to Collins and on Friday afternoon, they picked them up and brought them home to the farm. They did this for one year.

When Edward and Elsie's little girl got old enough to go to school, they sold their home to Alfred and his brother Joseph and moved to Whitwell to start a grocery store. Edward loved to tinker with old clocks, watches and guns, and he kept a little tinkering room, even in Whitwell. Alfred later rented Edward's house to families who worked the sawmills. It became like most rental houses do, almost uninhabitable, but when the county built a road on that side of the creek, Alfred moved his family across the creek into the rental house. Alfred's brother Joseph had sold his part of the farm to Alfred and moved to Chattanooga. He had arthritis so badly that the doctor told him he needed to find a job where he could be inside and not out on a farm. Norma and Alfred had to do a lot of work including turning a porch into a kitchen before they could settle in comfortably. At last now they could get to the highway without worrying about crossing the creek. Those were the only two houses that Norma ever lived in as a married woman. She hated to leave the bigger house on the other side of the creek, but she worked hard to make a good home for her family in the smaller house.



J. H. H. Boyd House
Built ca 1897

Gage TN Post Office

Stocker Home Place

(Photo June 1984)

Alfred Stocker was a farmer. He loved the land and poured his life and soul into making the old Savage farm a working farm. The Savage farm, plus 1400 acres Alfred bought from Lawson Hill, made Stocker land go all the way to Highway 399. Also there are 200 acres across the highway, which belonged to the Stockers. Norma and Alfred gave the three boys the 200 acres. The pine beetles were

destroying the pines, so they had to be cut. Norma managed to get all three of her sons through high school. When Don wanted to join the Army, she tried to talk him out of it. She wanted Alfred to speak up and be on her side, but he kept quiet. Don felt he would have to go to the military sooner or later, so he went ahead and joined. He served two years with one of those being in France and Germany. When he came home, he did what he had always wanted to do—work a sawmill. He eventually had his own mill on the Stocker farm, remnants of which can be seen as one level out at the bottom of Stocker Road before it climbs up to Norma's house. Her son, James, graduated from University of Tennessee and got a job in Chattanooga and never came back to the farm to work, but he made many visits home for family fellowship. Russell finished high school and immediately went to work for Bowater Inc., a producer of wood fiber products. The company sent him to school in Atlanta where he studied topography. He has been in the woods all his life and knows just about every foot of the Cumberland Plateau. Although he was never licensed, he is an expert surveyor.



Norma Mae (Sitz) Stocker with her three sons; L to R: James, Don and Russell

Alfred Lewis Stocker passed away on March 28, 1995 at the age of eighty-nine, and was interred at the Fall Creek Cemetery alongside his parents, his four siblings and his little son, Jarvis. Several years earlier, his doctors had told him that he had an aneurysm. For his health and comfort in the remaining years, he was told that hard work was out of the question. The doctors did not think he would live very long. He did slow down on the farm and lived several more years. When I asked Norma if she had to work hard on the farm, her soft answer was, “Let me put it this way: I enjoyed it; if you enjoy what you do, then it is not hard work!” To date, 2009, Norma has lived seventy-five years on the old Savage land. She plans on staying put and hanging around for a while.

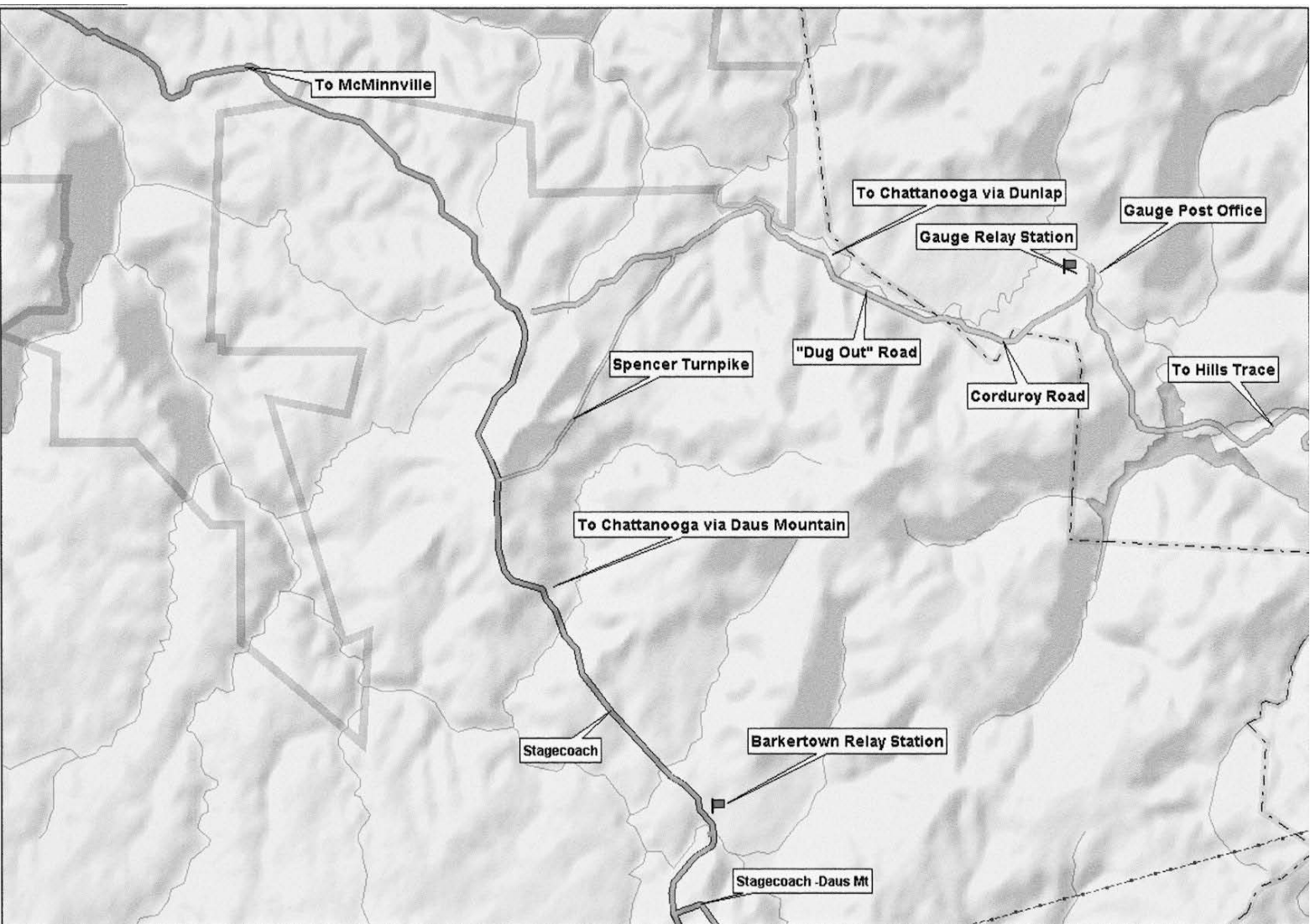
NOTE: I am sad to report the passing of one of Norma's sons, Don Stocker. He passed away on August 5, 2009. Please go to <http://www.grundycountyhistory.org/> to read more stories on the Savage Gulf. Choose "Articles by Society Members" from the menu on the left; then on the right scroll down to the story, "Can These Bones Live?" and "Dad, Why Did You Ever Leave Here?" Many stories have been and will be written about Grundy County. With so much good research going on, newly found facts constantly emerge that may shed new light on certain aspects of my stories. I am happy to make corrections. Ralph Thompson has added helpful maps in this article and below. Rest assured that Norma Mae (Sitz) Stocker has many more stories to tell. I hope I am one of many who continue to turn the pages of her history book. Have fun with your "digging up bones!" (Jackie Layne Partin, P. O. Box 295, Monteagle, TN 37356 or jackiepartin@blomand.net)

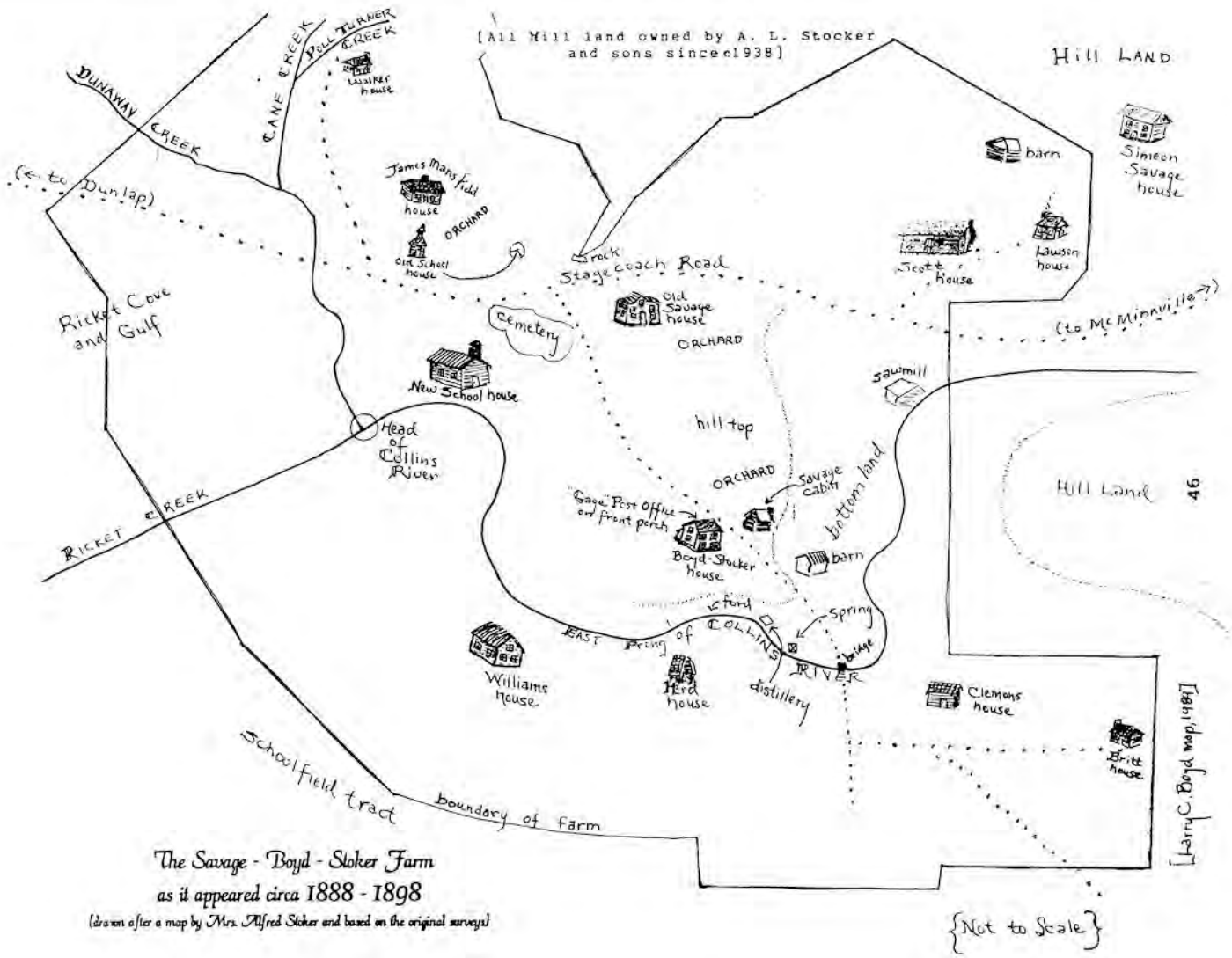


Meet "My Match," Norma Mae (Sitz) Stocker (2009)

Appendix

Stage Coach Routes ca Early 1800's
Based on BSA Map





The Savage - Boyd - Stoker Farm
 as it appeared circa 1888 - 1898
 (drawn after a map by Mrs. Alfred Stoker and based on the original surveys)

{Not to Scale}