

MEMORIES FROM MY FATHER

My father, Edward Price Smith was born November 1, 1916 in a lumber camp at Skymont located in Grundy County Tennessee. He was born to John (Jesse) Edward Smith and Katie Lee Killian who lived in a two-roomed tent with wooden floors. John was recruited from Mississippi where he worked for a railroad timber company as a sawright (saw filer). He was born to John J. Smith and Susan Etheridge May 11, 1877 in Stewart County Tennessee. He first married in Stewart County and later divorced when he moved to Grundy County somewhere between 1910 and 1914. It was at this time that he changed his name from John to Jesse but was called Edd. In 1914 he married Katie daughter of Jeremiah D. Killian and Lennie Lee Ware. Jeremiah was a Confederate Soldier and was the son of one of the founding fathers of Grundy County, Ambrose Killian. Lennie Lee was the daughter of William Washington Ware, a teacher, and Mary Catherine Argo, also from Grundy County.

Skymont, at the time of my father's birth, was remote with one of the main products being its abundant hard wood trees. Timber men had long tried to find a way to profitably harvest these trees but the rough terrain was not suitable for the usual method of bringing the logs to the mill operation. One Clarence McGee?? opted for a mobile sawmill. He would take the sawmill to the timber. This made it much easier for the woodsman to harvest timber that had been unavailable previously. He owned the timber rights to a very large area around Skymont and his mill hands had to adapt to the life of a mobile camp. He also knew that the two most important employees at the sawmill were the sawyer and the sawright (saw filer). He traveled far to find persons who possessed the best skills for his mills.

The living quarters were primitive, even for the times. The tents were usually two-roomed, for families, or single-room for the single hands. The floors were made of rough wood connected in such a way that they could be very quickly broken down and loaded onto a wagon for movement to another mill site. One room served as a bedroom while the other served all the additional needs. In these camps, there was no running water except springs and small wood stoves were used to cook meals. There were always lots of snakes under the floor and throughout the camp area. A provision wagon would bring supplies to the camp once a week. Other meals consisted of deer, squirrel or other wild game that each family could supply. Life was very hard, especially for the women and children of the camps. A few days after the birth of my father, a physician from Pelham visited the camp and checked on the condition of the baby and the mother. I have heard many stories from my grandfather about the hunting prowess of his dog Lady and how he went hunting with an axe. When the dog treed

the squirrel, he would cut the tree and the dog would catch the squirrel as it came out of its hole. He said that he didn't have enough money to purchase shells for his shotgun.

Katie Lee died about six months after the birth of her daughter in 1921. She was 23. The cause of death was appendicitis. Dad was sent to live with his grandmother, Linnie Lee Killian, and his sister Delma to Katie's sister, Lula Grace Killian Powell. John (Jesse) then married Nannie Hobbs and they started their family of four. John (Jesse) now lived in a house in Coalmont. He died in 1966.

The ardent hardships of our forefathers are in stark contrast to that in which we now experience. This group of poverty stricken, outdoors hardened and independent natured people left us a legacy of lives lived without the trappings of convenience we now take for granted. It is only through the memories of the elders who were there that we are able to experience second or third-handedly the essence of those hardy souls.

Now that I have found the location of Skymont, I plan to take my father to see the area in which he was born. The exact spot would be impossible to find but we might guess where the most convenient place for a sawmill in each little area might be located. My grandfather and his family are not found on the Grundy County 1920 census to which I would attribute to the remoteness and fluidity of the saw camps.

Dr. Ron Smith