

Reflections on Woodley, Faraway, Rowe's Mill, and Rapidan

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Woodley

I remember riding in a wagon when we moved from Rockwood to Woodley. I imagine that Mr. Reynolds drove the wagon with a load of furniture or something. I think he was the only hired hand we had, so I think he was the one who drove it. He worked for Daddy at Rockwood and came to Woodley to be the dairy man. We moved to Woodley in



December, just before Christmas of 1927, and it was cold. I was just under four years old, but I remember it. After we arrived at Woodley, Richard took me out on the porch to relieve myself over the side of the roof. I don't think there was anyone there below me unloading the wagon at the time. We had a bathroom, but for some reason he took me up there; I think he was showing off. He was about eight years old. He wanted to show me that he knew you could go up on the roof; he had been to Woodley before.

We were sleeping on the back porch at Woodley one time and there was a loud crash out on Route 15. It turned out that Gracie Lee, Mrs. Wood's daughter, and her boyfriend had been in a bad accident. I don't recall any serious injuries but it was a scary thing. [Mrs. Wood lived on the place to help.]

Sam, Richard, and Daddy were out at the road on Route 15 once. We had cattle in a field on the other side of the road. They had opened both gates and were herding the cattle across Route 15. Sam got in front of a car and got hit. I remember seeing Daddy bringing Sam in his arms to the house, probably still unconscious. He was about nine or ten. That was probably the closest we ever came to losing another child.

When I was about 13 years old, Daddy bought a mule from a man who lived between Orange and Rapidan. He took me down there to ride the mule home to Woodley. In trying to get to the highway, I had to cross a bridge on a dirt road and the mule refused to cross it. Mr. T.T. Curtis, future president of the Virginia Farm Bureau, was in his field shucking corn, saw my dilemma, came over, kicked the mule, and made him go across the bridge. I think when I got to Orange, I had to go under an underpass, and the mule stopped again. Daddy came along and helped me out, I think.

Along about the time I finished 5th or 6th grade, Sam and I became able to plow corn. We would be given a team of horses, harnessed and ready, ride them to Rockwood from Woodley, and hook them up to the plow. We would finish plowing and then go home. We never knew what time it was. One day we got back to Woodley around 3 in the afternoon. We thought it was around 5 or 6. Everyone made fun of us for quitting early. The nice part of it was that Mama would fix lunch, Daddy would bring it to us, and we would sit by the ice pond and have a nice visit with him while we ate lunch. That was a little quality time with our father. He was good at that.

Once we went to a reenactment of the Battle of Chancellorsville. Cadets from VMI and VPI participated, one school representing the north and the other the south. Daddy and Mama and us boys went to see it. I was walking along in front of my parents, and some friend observed that I was slew-footed. I ended up going to a doctor in Orange, but I don't think anything came of it.

Nancy went to stay with Aunt Lucy in Accomac one summer, and it worked out so well that she lived there during the fifth, sixth, and seventh grades. I think she went there because Lucy's death was especially hard on her. On her return to Orange, Mama arranged a picnic on the grounds of Mayhurst to reintroduce her to her friends. We built a fire and roasted hot dogs. I helped cut sticks for the hot dogs.

In 1936 or 1937, Sam and I rode on a wagon with Ben Seikford, pulled by four horses to Madison Mills. Ben was a farm hand who worked for Daddy, and we were taking a load of wheat to Madison Mills. In 1937, Daddy loaded up the wagon with wheat, hooked up four horses, and sent Sam and me off by ourselves to Madison Mills. You rode on one of the horses. I had a little difficulty backing into the place where we unloaded the wagon. Some man helped me. I was about 13 years old.

The night before we left Woodley [1938], we had supper around the table, all twelve of us. The next morning, they got us up and said, "You're not going to school today; we're going to move." That was the last day all twelve of us were together like that. I knew we were moving, but didn't know very far ahead of time. That morning, Sam and I were put on a wagon to go to Far Away. So I arrived at Woodley in a wagon, and left in a wagon.

We had a truck of some sort that we used to move stuff for some time ahead of the actual moving day. We left early in the morning, so I don't know anything about the rest of the day at Woodley. I must have been there before because I knew how to get there. We had a load of hay with a wooden watering trough on top of it. We drove all day but didn't make it; it got dark. We were within maybe two miles. Richard and Daddy came out looking for us in the pickup truck with a lantern which they put on the back of the wagon. Richard drove the wagon the rest of the way, and Daddy took Sam and me in the truck on to Far Away.

There were questions about what we could take with us according to the laws dealing with bankruptcy. We had a horse named John, a very fast-paced horse, who was damaged when he was trained. If you put him in a team of two, he would try to pull the whole load. He was not a horse we chose to keep. We were allowed to keep two horses, and we had chosen Dutch and Patsy, more valuable or traditional farm horses. We were allowed to take John to Far Away with the understanding that he would be brought back and sold during the sale. Richard rode him back to Woodley, but no one bid on him, so Richard rode him back to Far Away.

Jo was already at VPI when we moved. She came home for Christmas of 1937 to Woodley, and by the end of the spring term of 1938, the family had moved to Far Away.

Richard move to Far Away with us and commuted to Orange to finish his junior year of high school. Then he lived with the H. Oliver Lyon family during his senior year. They lived on a farm between Orange and Madison Mills. Mr. Lyon's son married Florence Sanford, Uncle Wallace's daughter.

Nancy went to live for two years with Roland and Jo Hill at Berry Hill so she could finish high school in Orange.

Far Away

Far Away was owned by Uncle Wallace and Cousin Roland Hill. Uncle Wallace had moved another family out so we could live there. We called it Far Away because it was so far away from where we had been.

I was pretty much unaware of the stress my parents endured because of my age. Daddy didn't sit around and mope; he went out and plowed a garden as soon as we moved in. It was a very impressive vegetable patch, more than just a garden, that he developed there. That's where he grew the watermelons. I have very little memory of the house itself.



Ellie, Sam, and I got on a bus and rode about an hour to school. The bus went by Mine Run School, and Sam got off to go to school there. Mine Run was an elementary school, but Mama wanted Ellie to go to Unionville instead. Mama knew people in the school system, having been a teacher, and had the connections to get Ellie into the Unionville School. We were the first ones on the bus and the last ones home; it was a long ride.

I came home from school one day and found Mama behind the house, leaning against the house, squatted down, and crying. It was evidence of more strain than I realized as a kid. She formed a friendship with a Mrs. Gooch who lived near us at Far Away. Her husband was a farmer who did things by the phases of the moon. Walker and Richard have kept up with that family through the years. We lived there from April to September of 1938. Far Away was not much of a farm.

We went back to Rockwood to harvest the grain crop that Daddy had put in before the bankruptcy sale. We finished cutting the wheat about 3 p.m. that afternoon. Daddy put me on a horse with the idea of me riding it to Far Away, about 15-16 miles away at least. That causes me to question my father's judgment. I got as far as Unionville and it was dark. He came along and made arrangements to leave the horse in someone's garage for the night. We came back the next day and I rode the horse the rest of the way.

Rowe's Mill

In September of 1938 we moved to Rowe's Mill. Daddy rented Rowe's Mill from Maude Rowe, his cousin who lived in Richmond. She was possibly related through Daddy's Aunt Blanche, Lelia Johnson Sanford's sister, who married a Rowe. I got in trouble with Aunt Blanche as a kid. She was an elderly lady who came to visit us at Woodley once a year, and we all had to kiss her. We were gathered at the table and I said, "Kiss Aunt Blanche." She heard me, so I was in big trouble with her. The school situation was better there. We all went to Unionville and were the last ones to get on the bus. Unionville had grades one through high school in two buildings, so all seven of us went there on the same bus.



Smokehouse at Rowe's Mill

I get the layouts of the houses at Far Away and Rowe's Mill confused in my mind, but Rowe's Mill is much clearer to me. The upstairs was divided into two areas. In one end of the house, there were two rooms. Walker had one room. Sam and I and maybe Ben had the other. The rest of the kids slept in the main part of the upstairs.

One time Maude Rowe, a big woman, brought a skinny paper-hanger over to paper the place. I helped him and that's when I learned how to hang wallpaper. There was a girl my age named Maude Rowe who lived at Mine Run and went to school with me at Unionville. I'm sure they were related. One time Walker and Richard were coming home from Orange and stopped at a tavern or some sort of place where they had dancing. Virginia was there, as she was visiting relatives in the area (she was from Alexandria). Walker struck up a conversation with her and they probably had a couple of dates. According to Richard, Walker joined the Army so he could move to northern Virginia to keep in touch with her.

Jo would come home for the weekend from Stafford County, where she was working as a home demonstration agent.) She had a car with a radio in it, and would allow us to sit out in the car and listen to the radio. I don't think we ran her battery down. One night, there was a crash down at the creek (Mine Run), with car lights shining off in different directions. We knew there had been an accident. Richard and I went down there in Jo's car. It was a bunch of high school kids that Richard knew. Richard loaded them in Jo's car and took them to Orange for medical attention, and left me there with the wrecked car. We didn't see the other driver that night. The next morning, a Sunday, while I was still upstairs, I heard some noise. I came out and there was this guy standing at the door with blood all over him at the door. I spoke with him and he told me he'd been in the accident. I took him to the well and gave him some water. I don't recall what happened to him. We suspected he was drunk and hid all night to avoid being found.

Two years after we left Woodley, Daddy borrowed money through the Farm Security in order to buy Goldenrod Farm.

Rapidan

While we were still at Rowe's Mill, I dropped out of school for my senior year, knowing that we'd be moving. There was work to be done at both places, Walker was in the service, and Richard was at VPI. Before we moved, I went over to Rapidan and lived with the McCarty's for several wks, going home on weekends, the last time on John, the horse. I put in a wheat crop on some land we rented from Cousin Jo Halsey.



Daddy bought a truck, and he and I built a body for it. We used it to haul our stuff from Rowe's Mill to Goldenrod. The best time I had with him was when we were building the body of the truck. He had taken me to Orange to drive the truck home. It was a big deal to ride in the truck

by the school, hoping someone would see me. We got lumber for the truck body from the sawmill. He was at his best when he was building something, drilling holes, putting in bolts, etc. We worked on that at Rowe's Mill for some days to get it done, both of us doing things we both enjoyed. I had him all to myself, as all the other kids were in school.

While I was at the McClary's, he came over some and stayed with Aunt Effie in Mitchells, and he would come up and have lunch with me. One day while we were working on the truck body, I made some suggestion and he said, "Do you think you know more than I do?" I said, "Don't you think you knew more than your father did?" That was the end of the conversation. I imagine he got a chuckle out of it and repeated it to Mama.

In December of 1940, we moved to Goldenrod Farm in Rapidan. In September of 1941, I went to Mitchells to finish my senior year. When I finished school in 1942, Mama discussed with me the possibility of going to work for Uncle Wallace in order to avoid being drafted, as his farming operation was big enough for me to get a deferment. It never seriously crossed my mind to do that; I took my chances and went to Strayer Business College. I wanted to study accounting, and my principal Mr. Williams who also acted as my guidance counselor, recommended that I go there. Nancy had gone there, but he's the one who really recommended it to me. I was only there about six months before I was drafted.

Walker finished high school by staying with Uncle Wallace. Afterward, he helped out as the main person on the farm at Rowe's Mill for two years before volunteering for the army.