

July 2021

From Aunt Anna Lee Edgar Bardy - daughter of Ida Estelle McFerrin-Edgar  
To Karen Ann Edgar Staggs

ALEY ANN HOWELL MCFERRIN

Pioneer Woman, Mother, Christian Woman

1878-1974

Aley's parents, John B. Howell and Sarah Howell were from Howell County, Missouri, a county that borders Arkansas just above Mt. Home. The county seat is West Plains. Around 1830, a Josiah Howell settled in that area which became known as Howell Valley. When the county was constituted in 1851 by the state of Missouri, it was named for the pioneer settler, Josiah Howell.

During the Civil War, Aley's parents, John B. Howell and Sarah Howell along with other members of the Howell family fled from Howell County Missouri when Civil War troops confiscated their farm. The area was overrun by marauding bands and soldiers. West Plains was entirely destroyed by fire. All official records were lost.

The Howells fled southward into Arkansas and ended up in the Crooked Creek valley not too far from what is now Harrison, Arkansas. The fertile valley provided them with a good supply of food and water. Aley was born at Everton, Arkansas. The three sisters, Anthem (Toney), Ida Bell (Hudson), and Aley (McFerrin) attended the White Church, located not far off of what is today the intersection of Highway 7 and Highway 206 toward Gaither. As young teenagers they were baptized at the White Church. The building no longer exists but the cemetery is still here, surrounded by tall prairie grasses.

The pull of owning their own land available by homesteading, probably led the Howell family to leave the green valley and move up on the mountain above Erbie. They became neighbors of the McFerrins.

Aley, petit and energetic, became Joseph Henry's wife on November 17, 1901 and they set up housekeeping in their new cabin. Life was hard and demanding as they cut, sawed, hoed to make a living for their expanding family.

Aley spent her whole adult life except for the last few years on the McFerrin Homestead. Aley birthed and raised five children: Vera Ophelia (Troy Phillips), John Bayard (Gladys Richardson), Ida Estelle (Ernie Edgar), Rhoda Hester (Lex Burge) and Troy Joe Cephas (J. C.; Joe)(Thelma Borland). They all survived the hardships of frontier life on the farm not far from what we call today "McFerrin Point."

Every Spring Aley and the children worked together to plant a very large garden, then to harvest and to can or dry fruits and vegetables in order to have plenty of food for the long cold winters. Aley made lye soap. She grated big heads of cabbage and made sauerkraut. She plucked the downy feathers of ducks and geese and stuffed pillows and mattresses. She knit socks, gloves, and sweaters. She pieced scraps of material and made quilts.

She taught her daughters to sew and cook. Vera and Ida both became excellent seamstresses, often supporting their children with their handiwork. Some years later Vera, an exceptional seamstress, lived near the campus of Oklahoma Baptist University, Shawnee, Oklahoma, made wedding and party dresses for many of the students. Ida, living in Arkansas and later in California, made all kind of clothing



B1

1878-1974

including suits and winter coats. One time she took an old adult-sized wool coat and cut it down and made her 5 or 6 year old niece, Greta Pearl, a beautiful warm coat. Ida worked for several years in garment factories sewing Levis and clothing. The other daughter, Hester, along with her sisters, was an excellent cook. She ran the Burge store at Compton with her husband Lex, and was appointed Assistant United States Post Master when Lex was appointed US Post Master, a position they held for many years.

According to talk among the cousins, Grandma Aley at some point became ill and took to her bed---for 10 years! She survived and lived to be 96 years old! Aley did suffer for many years of digestive problems and took bottle after bottle of Milk of Magnesia---those beautiful cobalt blue bottles. When she emptied one, she pitched it over the fence into the barnyard. The blue pile grew and grew taller as time went on.

Aley loved her grandchildren and enjoyed their Sunday noon and afternoon visits. She, with the help of Hester, always had fried chicken, mashed potatoes and gravy, and various pies and cakes. When it came time for the visit to end and everyone got up to leave, Aley ran to the kitchen and made everyone have a snack of left-over chicken wings or drumsticks, a biscuit and jelly, or the rest of the cakes or pies.

Aley, a small woman hardly 5 feet tall, could be outspoken at times. One time when some grandchildren came from California for a visit, the young great-grandson had very long hair which hung over his face. One day, Grandma Aley called the boy to her and told him to kneel down in front of her. She placed her hands on either side of his face and pushed the hair back. She said, "Just hold still a minute, let Grandma look at your face. I've not been able to see you. I want to remember what you look like."

On another occasion, one Sunday afternoon she told Anna Lee and Greta to wear their Sunday dresses when they came to visit. She did not want to see them in blue jeans!

All through the years, there was no church near the homestead. When there were guest preachers or revivals at Erbie, Compton or Plumley, they attended if possible. It meant walking or riding in a wagon or riding horse back for many miles to get there. Uncle Jimmy Richardson of Erbie was an itinerate preacher, who held meetings in various places. He visited the families in the area giving spiritual help when needed. For the most part, the radio became the main method of hearing the Gospel preached. Aley's Bible was well used, with passages underlined, corners of pages were "dog-eared" and special verses copied onto bits of paper were stuck throughout the Bible.

Joseph Henry and Aley raised their children by Christian principles even though they were not regular church-goers. It is thought that Joseph Henry's parents raised their children with strong Christian principles. According to the Arkansas History Commission, John B. McFerrin, Jr. had been a member of the Missionary Baptist Church back in Alabama or South Carolina. Aley's parents, the J. B. Howells, when first arriving in north Arkansas lived in the Crooked Creek Valley. Aley and her sisters, Ida and Anthem, were baptized at the White Church.

Around the 1950's (not sure of the year) The Open Door Bible Church sent a preacher to Compton to start a church, Brother Day and his family. They built a church building and a residence for the pastor and family next to the Compton school. Bro. Day often visited the McFerrins. He stated that he went to

1878-1974

cheer up Mrs. McFerrin because she was shut-in and couldn't attend church, but he always came away greatly cheered up himself. Joseph Henry had never been baptized. Bro. Day talked with him and determined that Joseph Henry was relying on Jesus for his salvation. He agreed to be baptized. Then Bro. Day explained that their church baptized by plunging the person face forward into the water. Joseph Henry had never heard of that method of baptizing so hesitated about being baptized. Bro. Day then agreed to baptize him by laying him backward into the water.

After Joseph Henry and Aley became older and had health problems, it was decided that the farm should be sold and they should move nearer to Compton where Hester and Lex lived and could more easily care for them. For years, Hester had devotedly cared for her parents, driving from Compton to the farm several times a week. It was not an easy decision to give up the land that had been in the McFerrin family for around 100 years.

The farm was sold to the Les Villines family, and Joseph Henry and Aley moved to a small house and acreage on Highway 43 near Compton. After years of living "at the end of the road", they now enjoyed having neighbors and having lots of traffic pass their house. They kept a cow and a few chickens when they first moved there. Out their back door was a well with a framework for a pulley to lower and lift a bucket. Beautiful purple wisteria vines grew on the outer framework of the well.

They now had a mailbox in front of their house. They also had electricity for the first time in their lives! When the electricity had been installed, a glass domed meter was placed on the outside wall. Inside the dome, a small silver disc turned round and round. The little disc fascinated Joseph Henry. He often walked outside and watched the little disc turn. Someone, to tease him, told him that every turn was a penny's worth of electricity. He became very upset when he began counting and soon decided they could not afford having electricity and better have it disconnected. Fortunately the electricity was never turned off!

As their health deteriorated, it was decided they should move to Harrison to be near their doctor and the hospital. A house was rented on North Maple Street just below the Bower Avenue and Maple Street intersection. They were only a few blocks from Joe Cephas and Thelma.

On September 13, 1969, Joseph Henry passed away at age of 93. After that a small flagstone house next door to Joe Cephas and Thelma was rented and Grandma Aley lived there until her death on September 30, 1974.

While Grandma Aley lived next door, Joe Cephas and Thelma checked on her several times a day and kept her refrigerator stocked with food. Hester drove into town often to see her. One morning, Thelma went over to check on her, and opened the refrigerator to put some food into it. There sat a beautiful big chocolate meringue pie with one slice missing. Thelma asked Aley where the pie came from, stating it had not been there yesterday. Aley was silent. Thelma inquired again. Finally Aley said, "Well, I couldn't sleep well last night, and I got to thinking of chocolate meringue pie, so I just got out of bed and made one!" She had made a crust, the filling and whipped egg whites and baked it in the oven! Then had cut a slice and eaten it, then had gone back to bed!

Thelma was astounded! She said, "Why Grandma, you should have told me you were hungry for chocolate pie. I would have made you one." Aley responded, "Well, at my age, I didn't think I could wait any longer!"

\*

Both Joseph and Aley were laid to rest in the Hill Top Cemetery. The McFerrin Cemetery was at that time grown up in bushes and weeds. Their daughter Hester and her husband Lex Burge were buried near them in the Hill Top Cemetery. Their son, Joe Cephus and his wife Thelma were buried there also.

The following should be inserted above at the \*:

One morning Thelma went to check on Grandma. She found her still in bed which was unusual. Thelma heard her softly speaking so bent low over the bed. Grandma was quoting Psalm 103. "Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name....."

In a few minutes Thelma realized that Grandma was no longer breathing. She had slipped away to be with her Lord, on September 30, 1974.

