

8. ELBERT MASON SENTELLE (1868-1947)

About the time that Rachel Jones and Gideon Sentelle set up house-keeping at the close of the Civil War, her cousin Mason K. Jones drowned in the Nolichucky River. Betsy Jones was Mason's daughter and she came to make her home with the Sentelle family shortly after this tragedy.

Rachel also had a brother by name of Mason Elbert Jones, her senior by almost two years and next to her the youngest of the eight surviving children of Balis Jones and Catharine Nichols.

Perhaps it was only natural that the young couple remembered both Rachel's brother and Betsy's father when they named the boy born 8 April 1868 Elbert Mason.

Eb was the only Sentelle child among the first three to survive infancy. William Bruce had lived less than six months, and Homer Eugene died in his fourteenth month, the day after Jenny was born and when Eb was two years old.¹

He was too young perhaps to remember the somber circumstances of his infancy, but seniority alone would have set Eb apart from his seven brothers and sisters. As often happens with the oldest child, he marched to his own drummer.

We noted earlier that Eb, of all the children except Jim, showed little interest in books and other things his father took for marks of refinement. And Eb and Jim turned against their father's politics in those years following the Civil War when a vote for the Democratic ticket was tantamount to treason and sedition.

A Description

Man of contradictions. In a phrase, Elbert Mason Sentelle was a man in whom the elements were mixed. Like most of us, he meant well but often failed. He pursued his goals with energy and determination, but frequently allowed his enthusiasm to cloud his judgment.

Almost as though for some reason we need to be convinced, those who knew him tell us again and again that everyone liked Eb Sentelle. He tried to look after his friends, and sometimes in doing so he unwittingly made bitter enemies.

¹ William Bruce Sentelle, born 24 November 1866, died 16 May 1867; Homer Eugene Sentelle, born 24 December 1869, died 7 February 1871. Both infants were buried at Harrison's with a single marker between their graves. This memorial shows a birth date of 24 December 1870 for Homer, but this date would be too close to square with the birth of Jenny (6 February 1871).

He was generous to a fault, and his generosity as sometimes happens earned contempt for him as often as gratitude.

A handsome gentleman. In physical stature Eb was short, standing about five feet six inches in height. The children remember that he had "awful pretty blue eyes," and a fair complexion. Our earliest photographs of him made probably about the time of his marriage at age twenty-four show intense deep-set eyes in a broad square forehead. His good bone structure and high cheekbones gave his face a carved, sculpted look. His expressions reflected a youthful confidence which bordered on arrogance. His hair turned gray suddenly, almost over a single weekend, but in later years he remedied this situation with artificial coloring.

Reuben Treadway who took over Eb's sales route in the thirties remembers his associate as short and stocky. He was decidedly not gray-headed. Treadway never knew Eb to swear, or to conduct himself in any manner unbecoming a gentleman.²



Eb Sentelle (1868-1947)
Portrait when he was 24 years
old (1892).

A small depression in his center forehead above the bridge of his nose had resulted from a surgical procedure to clear sinus blockage. He had at least two of these operations about six to eight years apart, the first performed by Dr. Bob Reeves³ in Knoxville, and the second at Jones Clinic in Johnson City.

Headaches and ill temper. Eb often suffered from severe sinus headaches, and these may have given rise to the ill temper often manifested within the immediate family but hidden from outsiders. He was solemn in temperament, and not given to jokes or humorous stories.

Bill Higgs told ghost stories and tall tales to the Sentelle children. Corn grew so thick in Kentucky, he said, that they let horses trample a field and then collected the kernels as they spilled through the fence between the rails. Henry watched his father's face during these sessions, but Eb never broke his deadpan

² Interview 15 March 1981. Treadway also remembers Eb wearing a small mustache.

³ Dr. Reeves was a brother-in-law of Eb's brother, Jim. The first operation was "before Jack died (5 December 1928)."

demeanor. Yet Eb enjoyed children, and he was always good to take care of his own. Bill and Nanny remember that he often brought them candy, and carefully divided it piece by piece between his two youngest children.

When Henry and Anne returned from their honeymoon, they chanced to meet Eb somewhere along the road. He greeted his son with an accusatory remark that sounded less than genial to the bride. "What have you been up to now?" he asked Henry in a tone of demeaning sarcasm.

Anne Little remembered Eb as a critical daughter-in-law might. "Eb never went to school, and he didn't want any of his children to go to school," she said. "He wanted everybody to stay home and work the farm. . . . Henry had to pay his own way through school -- every penny." The oldest son, in fact, was beyond his thirtieth birthday and well on his own when he began college with a football scholarship. Jack graduated from Lincoln Memorial University, and Bill tried a semester at Milligan. Nor do we have any reason to believe the girls were denied such formal schooling as they desired.

Marriage. On 6 November 1892, when he was twenty-four years old, Eb married Nannie Broyles, a second cousin through their Jones relations. She was younger than him by seventeen months. The service was performed by her venerable uncle by marriage, Madison G'Fellers.⁴

Nannie Broyles (1869-1911)

Nannie Evelyn Broyles was born 20 November 1869, third of the six children of Oliver Marion Broyles and Sarah Joanna King.⁵

Pioneer families. The families of both parents were among pioneer settlers in East Tennessee. Nannie was the third generation of the Broyles clan to live on Horse Creek near Cedar Grove in eastern Greene County and the fifth generation on the Nolichucky. The Broyles ancestors came from Wurttemberg with the Germanna Colony of 1717, and at least three brothers had removed to East Tennessee from present-day Madison County, Virginia, with the flood of white settlers in the 1780s.

Oliver's mother was a sister to Balis Jones, a daughter of George (Corn) Jones, and a granddaughter of James Houston. Sarah King took her middle name no doubt from Joanna Patton, her maternal grandmother who was a daughter of Mary Patton -- the same who made gunpowder for the militia before their overmountain march to whip the British at King's Mountain. Powder Branch

⁴ **Greene County** (Tennessee) **Marriage Record 7 (1889-1894)**, p. 182. Madison G'Fellers (1812-1895) married Eliza Emaline Broyles (1815-1869) in 1835.

⁵ Oliver Broyles family **Bible**, held by Robert R. Broyles, Jr., Chuckey, Tennessee.

in present-day Carter County is named for the Patton gunpowder mill once sited on that stream.

The paternal grandmother King was a daughter of Irish-born Col. George G. Gillispie whose station-fort near the mouth of Big Limestone on the Nolichucky was burned by the Cherokee in 1776. The stone house he and his son built in Limestone community on the fort site in 1792 is commemorated today by an historical marker on U. S. Highway 11-E nearby. Oliver Broyles met Sally King during a Methodist meeting at Stone Dam Campground (on Sinking Creek, north of Afton), and they married in Greene County on 26 August 1862.

"A beautiful woman". Nannie Broyles stood about five foot four or five inches in height. Her complexion was fair. Her eyes were brown and her hair was dark brown or black. She was slow to anger, but the children remember that she could put a switch to good use if the need arose. Usually, though, Nannie was quiet and easygoing. Some people even considered her to be somewhat timid in disposition. Sam Thompson once told Lucy that her mother had been a beautiful woman. "I would have married her," he said, "but our families discouraged it because we were too close kin."⁶



Nannie Sentelle (1869-1911)
Portrait when she was 22 years
old (1892).

Letter to a cousin. Nannie was admired by several fellows in the neighborhood, or so she once wrote to a cousin. By improbable chance, the letter has come to our attention, and we have now the thoughts and words as they came from her own hand at age twenty.⁷

**Harse Creek Tenn.
January the 26 th 1890.
My Dear Cousin.**

**doubtless you have dispaired of a reply Ere this. I should
have written Ea[r]lier but have gust neglected it[.] We are all
well as could Except colds[.] Mama is not very well but is able**

⁶ Samuel Hunter Thompson (1876-1952) was the son of a first cousin. He was sixteen when Nannie married just sort of her 23rd birthday. We suspect that such romantic inclinations as he might have had toward her were never reciprocated by Nannie toward one so much her junior.

⁷ Letter provided by Frances Oliver Maynard, 2821 West Boyce Avenue, Fort Worth, Texas 76133. The "cousin" is Josephine Crouch, Frances Maynard's grandmother. Jenny Morelock is Nannie's sister.

to keep us children strate. Mama sayEs to tell you she would love for you all to be here and help us Eate apples[.] We have some vErry good ones Yet. Who did Hattie K. marry[?] is he in good circanstances and a good looking man[?] do they live near you all. I guess you have not heard that JEnne was marr[i]ed[.] she got married on New Years day[.] she has got a Verry good looking husband[.] his name is GEargE Morelock[.] he has Black hair and EyEs[.] he is a Very good man. They have not gone to house keeping Yet but will as soon as they can Get there house built. There was a protracted meeting at Cedar Grove near here[.] it held ov[e]r far ne[a]r three WEEKS[.] there was about 35 professed religion. Jim Broyles and Walter Range was here during holidays[.] they staid three are four days. come out and see us all[.] WE would love to see you. Grandma wrote us that Aunt was comi[n]g to Tenn in a Year are two[.] Expect she would have much better health if she would come here and stay a Year any way. are you married Yet[?] if you are tell me all about him what kind of a Fellow he is[.] My Fellow is real pretty I think[.] tell that Fellow you wrote about to come on after me[.] I want to go to Texas any way. I have the Best looking Fellow in this community so I think but I can[']t get any one to say so[.] That is my Best one of course[.] I have more than one but they are so -- Well[,] I won[']t say what I think of them[.] Well[,] I guess I have written as much as you will care to read[.] Write as soon as you can and don[']t wait as long as I have[.] give my love to all the family and a large partion your self[.]

Excuse all mistakes and Brefity[,] I am
Ever Your Cousin

Nanne Broyles.

Ps. tell aunt I only Weigh 176 lbs[.] I am so largE I can[']t hardly Wear any of my Dresses[.] I have sent to the store for goods to make me some Dresses[.]

Write soon[.]

Josie Carry said to tell you she would [like] to see you[.] she has company to Day[.] she is out tom boying around[.] she is not in[.] she intended to write you but has to intertain her company[.]

Everyone agrees that size in our recent generations comes from the Broyles side of the family, but if Nannie weighed 176 pounds in 1890, she must have lost it soon afterwards. She married Eb Sentelle in Greene County on 6 November 1892, and in the formal portraits made about that time she appears to be no more than medium in weight -- not slender, but at the same time not plump or heavy as we might be led to believe.

Sickness and death. Nannie brought eight children into the world between 1893 and 1910, but she was never in good health after Bill was born (26 April 1908). Old Dr. Claude Fox came by occasionally to tend her, and the children heard that their mother suffered from a form of nephritis, or kidney inflammation, called Bright's disease. Her last child and namesake was born on 17 November 1910, and the mother never left her bed after this for any length of time. She became progressively weaker, and she had been bedfast nearly a year when she died on 11 June 1911.

In the course of the slow tragedy, Eb brought in a succession of housekeepers to tend the children and do the heavy work. Among them were Mary Bug Willis, a Ricker woman, and Grandma Shepherd. And then there was Margaret Simpson. She was the oldest of the three daughters of Zeb and Betsy Simpson who lived over the hill on Frank Creek. General consensus held that Eb had always been "foolish toward the Simpsons," and Nannie told folks that one day her husband would "marry one of those Simpson girls."

Maggie Simpson

Joe Simpson shared one or more business ventures with Eb Sentelle. They ran a general store one time at Henshaw, near Hermon Church on Middle Creek. Joe also operated a warehouse in Afton, where Eb kept his fertilizer consignments until local farmers could pick up their orders. Joe was Maggie's older brother, and the store partnership had been established by 1906 or earlier.⁸ Thus, Eb had Simpson ties several years before Maggie came to keep house. We have no record how long the arrangement continued, but another Simpson sister claimed that Eb was "crooked and unfair to Joe." This must have been sometime later, however.

The Simpson marriage. The children knew that some heavy courting was in progress, and so must everyone else in the community. Yet people were surprised when Eb announced that he intended to marry Maggie Simpson. Someone objected to Eb saying, "Your wife has only been dead a year."

"Well," he responded, perhaps with the only reply possible under the circumstances, "she is as dead as she will ever be."

Our reports on the matter have all the marks of strong bias. The children were opposed to the match at the start, and they seemed to have resented it afterwards. Yet, we suspect that some of the talk strikes close to the truth of the matter.

⁸ Macy remembers walking with her mother to the store when they lived in the old Brown house.

In later years when two of the girls had slipped away to marry, Mag remarked to Lucy that there would be talk. "It won't be the first scandal in the community," her stepdaughter replied. "They talked about you and Daddy." Mag never mentioned the subject again, but Eb later scolded Lucy for what she had said.

Eb Sentelle and Maggie Simpson were married by her uncle Bob Dobson at the minister's home on 27 July 1912.⁹ Macy and Lucy, the two older girls, were taken to the wedding by their Uncle Check (Chester) Sentelle. Henry was not present, Lucy tells us, even though Eb wanted him to be there.

Life at home. The girls insist there was never a love relationship between Eb and Mag such as there had been between him and their mother.

He found out she was a good cook. Mag wanted a man; Papa wanted a cook. She never tried to fix anything to eat but what she and Papa liked.

Papa wanted us to call her "Mama." She was never a mother to us. Lucy had to bathe Bill. Mag never looked after the younger children; the older children had to care for them. Macy was more of a mother than a sister to Nannie.

Papa always took Nannie to town to buy shoes and clothes. Mag never would. Nannie had three dresses when she started to high school, and Lucy had made them all. Mag wouldn't even show us how to lay out a pattern.

When Papa was gone, he wanted Nannie to sleep downstairs with Mag, but Nannie wanted to sleep upstairs with the other children. Nannie stayed at Uncle Jim [Sentelle]'s most of the time, and Aggie stayed at Uncle Ike's [Broyles] . . . always held it against Daddy for not allowing Aggie to come home.

I believe if I'd been foolish enough to marry a man with seven children, I'd try to be a mother to them.¹⁰

In this sadly divided home, the object of filial resentment and hostility suffered miscarriages on at least two occasions. She and Eb were never blessed with any children of their own, and Maggie must have paid many times over for any faults, real or imagined, in loneliness, sadness, and frustration. After Eb died,

⁹ **Greene County** (Tennessee) **Marriage Record 9**, No. 563. Robert M. Dobson had married Mag's aunt, Meg Good.

¹⁰ Lucy Kilday, Agnes Mauk, Nannie Mercer, Macy Walters, simultaneous interviews on 7 March 1981.

she spent most of the fifteen years or so remaining to her living with Flora and Mollie, two of her Simpson sisters at nearby Tusculum. But if the children felt neglected by their stepmother, their father made up for such shortcomings, and perhaps to a fault. He seems to have been overly protective, especially toward the girls.

Papa kept a tight rein. He didn't want you to stick your head out at all, even to go to ballgames. He didn't want the girls to go home with girl friends. He was real mad at Jack one time because he took Nannie swimming at Alexander's Beach.

We weren't allowed to go near the river at all. When Harvey Bowman drowned, Papa found out that Jack had been in the crowd.

He took him out to the barn, and I don't know whether he whipped him or just talked to him.

Papa never whipped any of the children -- except maybe Jack that time after Harvey Bowman drowned.

He always thought more about his boys than his girls. He never mistreated the girls, but if you were around anytime at all, you knew who rated.¹¹

The role of women was defined perhaps by local custom and agrarian tradition: Women kept the home and men tended the fields. Men had to eat heartily for the heavy work they had to do, so dinner was the midday rather than the evening meal. The men also needed time to rest and allow the food to settle before returning to work. For this reason, the men ate first. The children were next in line, and the women ate last in this remarkable order of things. Of course, when weather was bad, the men had nothing to do but eat heartily and then rest between meals. The Sentelle girls all enjoyed reputations as outstanding cooks, and they rated other women according to their respective culinary skills. The Sentelle men were likewise known for heavy eating habits, a convenient combination. Bill once thought himself seriously ill for loss of appetite. He had nothing for breakfast one day, he said, other than a cake of sausage, several slices of bacon, four eggs, hot biscuits, and two cups of coffee. He might have eaten a few baked apples as well, but he admitted he could not be sure.

Consistent with the early protective atmosphere in the home perhaps, the boys married late or not at all and the girls married older men. Henry married at age forty. Jack was a bachelor when he died at twenty-eight, and Bill remained single. Of the five marriages of Sentelle children, the husband was the senior of the wife by more than a dozen years in three instances.

¹¹ *bid.*

Where the Family Lived

Eb and Nannie Sentelle began their life together in a log house on a hill across Hopson Branch from where Gid and Rachel lived. The cabin was next to Cisco Reeve's general store, and on the other side of the road from Eb's parents.¹² Henry and Lucy were born in the log house (11 October 1893, 7 August 1895). The young family then moved to the "old Miller place" on land owned by Eb's mother, and Macy was born there (28 September 1897).

When Eb was serving as Register of Deeds for the county, the family rented at least two homes in Greeneville. The first was a frame house still standing (1988) at 218 Unaka Street, and then they moved to a second frame house at 313 North Main Street which was owned by the Doughty family.

About this time Eb began to buy land near Brown's Bridge on Moon Creek, and he moved his family to the old Frank Snapp log house which sat on the west side of the creek about a half-mile above its mouth on the Nolichucky. They were living at the Snapp place when their infant son Robert died of diphtheria (22 December 1903), and they were living there when Nannie's Aunt Anna died (17 January 1905). Henry went to Greeneville in a wagon with Eb to get a coffin.

Agnes was born in the old Brown house (5 April 1905) which was across the creek from the Snapp cabin and much closer to the river. There were good orchards at both places, and the children became fond of the Milams that made good apple butter, and the Rustycoat variety of apples which would keep all winter.

Sometime in 1906, Eb bought the Ramsey place, a two-story frame house about a mile up the road from Brown's Bridge. The Ramsey house had eight or nine rooms and a broad porch on three sides -- an ideal place for the men to rest from eating. It marked a considerable improvement over earlier houses the family had occupied, and here they made their permanent home.

Business Affairs

Eb undertook several business ventures. We noted earlier the store he and Joe Simpson operated at Henshaw. His brother Jim Sentelle ran a general store on the hill across Hopson Branch from their father's house in partnership with Cisco Reeves, Jim's father-in-law. Eb bought the Reeves interest for Jim, but never took an active part in the operation of the store.

¹² "Frank and Belle Moncier lived there for years." (Macy Walters)

Sometime after his second marriage, Eb bought a Greeneville chair factory in partnership with Isaac Broyles, Nannie's brother. He was forced to mortgage his farm to cover the losses of this enterprise, and Mark loaned his brother money to survive. The children tell us that Eb worried a lot over the factory, "but he took it with a smile. Uncle Ike nearly lost his mind over it."

Farming. Eb farmed and managed farm operations most of his life. He enjoyed a reputation for good hog products from his farm. Among the family papers, we find directions in his own hand for curing ham.

. . . For each 100 lbs. 2 lbs dark brown sugar, 2 qts. salt, 1/4 lb. black pepper, 1/4 lb. salt peter, a little red pepper, if you like, lay three weeks, take up and apply Liquid Smoke.

A number of items clipped for reference from newspapers and magazines include the following: "Growing Early Watermelons . . .," "To make good sausage . . .," "Pasture for livestock . . .," "Hogs need mineral water . . .," "Protecting flower beds from hens . . .," and "How to get ewe to adopt orphan lamb."

His old account books record payments to various men for work on the farm at one dollar per day: Buck McCoy (7 November 1925 - 4 August 1928, 18 March 1937 - 20 August 1937), Nick Childers (3 March - 26 May 1928), and Hobert Mercer (10 October - 4 December 1926).¹³

Foodstuffs were often used in place of cash. In 1927, Buck McCoy was paid 16 1/2 pounds of bacon at 20 cents per pound, and 25 pounds of flour at four cents per pound.¹⁴

Fertilizer sales. Throughout most of his adult life, Eb sold fertilizer and soil supplements for Virginia-Carolina Chemical Corporation or its subsidiary companies. From home offices in Richmond, Virginia, V-C operated seventeen regional offices across the country. Eb Sentelle was among some twenty salesmen who worked directly with the regional office in Atlanta, placing orders at plants in Rome, Augusta, Savannah, Athens (in Georgia), Lynchburg (Virginia), and Mt. Pleasant (Tennessee). V-C was one of the "big four" among American fertilizer companies,¹⁵ and paid salaries to its salesmen -- unlike smaller

¹³ Hobert married Nannie 20 May 1927.

¹⁴ Equivalent to 5 1/2 days of labor, valued at \$5.50, or \$1.00/day.

¹⁵ Others were International, Armour, and Swift.

companies which had to pay on commission. Other benefits included a car and travel expenses.¹⁶

Eb's personal account books indicate he was in the fertilizer business as early as October, 1898, when he recorded a payment "By cash to G. C. (Greene County) Bank on Atlanta note \$145.⁰⁰." A typical order to Birmingham Fertilizer Company in 1899, reads, "Sept. 6 B. B. & Pot. 7 1/2 tons Fullens \$18⁵⁰ ton \$138⁷⁵" -- which meant, "On 6 September, an order for bags of bone and potash fertilizer, 7 1/2 tons, to be delivered at Fullens Depot (Chuckey, Tennessee), at a cost of \$18.50 per ton, a total cost of \$138.75."

Eb traveled throughout upper East Tennessee placing orders with Coweta and V-C for local distributors in Newport, Tazewell, and Rogersville. His clients included Grover C. Bird in Greeneville, Charlie Gray at Afton, W. M. Lee Company in Jonesboro, Treadway Feed and Seed in Johnson City, and J. Hampton Hyder in Elizabethton.

Bill sometimes went with his father to distribute orders out of Joe Simpson's warehouse at Afton. Farm wagons were lined up to receive their shipments, twenty or more at a time. The fertilizer came in 200-pound bags, Bill remembers. "They didn't know that you could put it in smaller bags," he says.

Politics in Greene County

Eb Sentelle demonstrated a singular passion for local politics through most of his life, and this consuming interest commanded no small part of his attention and resources. Many of those close to him, including his own children, viewed his political activity as a waste of talent. Time and again we have heard that, "Papa could have been worth all kinds of money if he hadn't thrown it all away on politics."

Bill remembers his father disappearing for days on end at the time of a general election. "One time he finally came dragging in. Looked like he had been whipped real good. Said, 'We may have won the sheriff's race.'"

Eb was a strong Democrat all of his life, and in conservative East Tennessee where the Republicans had dominated politics since the Civil War, this meant he usually came out on the short side in local contests.

A sense of integrity. One time when Will Piper was the Republican candidate for a seat in the Tennessee Legislature, the Democrats were running far behind as usual. There was a caucus, and several people allowed as how

¹⁶ W. Reuben Treadway, interview 15 March 1981.

they had to steal some votes if the Democrats expected to have any chance at all in the race.

At this point Eb Sentelle spoke up. "We are not going to steal any votes," he declared. "We will buy votes if we have to, but we are not going to steal anything."

Bert Tipton¹⁷ who was in the meeting said he was always impressed with Eb's sense of personal integrity as demonstrated so clearly on this occasion.

Tipton remembered his neighbor across the Nolichucky as a man who insisted on paying for every obligation.

After his roller mill just below Brown's Bridge was destroyed by a flood in 1903, Tipton moved away. His son remembers visits back to Greeneville, and that he usually saw Eb Sentelle on such occasions in the vicinity of the Courthouse.

Register of Deeds. At the age of thirty years, Eb won the office of Register of Deeds for Greene County from Republican incumbent James A. Pates.¹⁸ We have a personal account record¹⁹ which shows that Eb was paid an annual salary of \$1,000 in monthly installments, and that he turned in fees to the County Trustee which were somewhat in excess of his pay. The office hired a Deputy Register for at least part of the time, and Eb's account book shows sporadic payments of \$30 per month for Deputy D. W. Williams.

The young official was reelected in 1902, but he may have grown weary of his duties by this time. Or his attention may have been distracted by additional efforts to support his growing family. Although he had lived a few convenient blocks away from his Courthouse office, sometime before the end of 1903 he moved to the old Frank Snapp place about six miles distant from the county seat. His father vacated his seat on the County Court about the time Eb's second term came to a close (1905), but this may be no more than coincidence. And we can

¹⁷ Albert Henry Tipton (1872-1912). This story was related by his son, Albert Carter Tipton of Elizabethton.

¹⁸ **The** (Greeneville, Tennessee) **Democrat**, ca. 20 January 1898, n. p. Pates announced as a Republican candidate. The transition was made on 5 September 1898. Pates dated his last entry at 11:50 a. m. and Eb dated his first entry at 3:00 p. m. This contrasts sharply with the three-month hiatus when Eb left office in 1906. **Greene County Deed Book 66**, pp. 393, 396. James Andrew Pates (1867-1921) was a friend of the Sentelle family. We have already noted the **Blueback Speller** he inscribed to Gideon under date of 27 February 1914.

¹⁹ Held by daughter Nannie Mercer who lives at the old home place.

only speculate on the reasons for a three-month suspension of business by the deeds office at the end.²⁰

A race for Trustee. Ten years or so later, Eb was back in politics, inspired perhaps by his brother Jim who ran as a Democrat and won their father's old seat on the County Court in 1916.²¹ Eb ran from the 14th Civil District and was seated from 1920 to 1923.

We have been able to trace his race for Trustee in 1922 through the local newspaper. The Democrats in this campaign promised "Relief from Ring Rule," "Economy in County Government," and "Clean Strong Businessmen In the Courthouse." Each of the five candidates solemnly declared that, "I did not spend a dollar or a drop of whiskey to secure my nomination."²²

The Democrat candidate for Trustee set forth his qualifications for the job in the traditional style and form of local political campaigns.

Everybody in Greene County knows Eb Sentelle, and almost everybody likes him. He is a man that makes friends easily, and holds them by his pleasant personality. Mr. Sentelle is a candidate for the office of Trustee. If he wins it, he will be able to give it his time and attention, and it has been proven that he makes a good, capable, honest public official. You all have confidence in Mr. Sentelle. You know he will give you a straightforward, clean, square administration, playing fair with the whole people. That is what Greene County wants.²³

Incumbent Trustee J. R. Kilday was returned for another term in the August election, but he may have hired Eb as his deputy. An undated newspaper clipping among the family effects makes an obscure reference to "J. R. Kilday 'Raskob' . . . his and Ebb Sentelle's office, his coworker."

Eb made at least one other race for the office of Trustee, probably in 1918, but he failed this time as well to overcome the traditional Republican strength in Greene County.

²⁰ Eb Sentelle registered his last deed at 1:15 p. m. on 6 June 1906. The next deed was entered at 7:00 a. m. on 3 September 1906 by R. A. Mercer. **Greene County Deed Book 80**, pp. 434, 436.

²¹ Jim Sentelle represented the 22nd District until his death in 1952.

²² **The Greeneville Democrat Sun**, 1 August 1922, *passim*.

²³ *Ibid.*

The Democrats for the most part were obliged to bide their time until the years of the Great Depression when they finally gained a slender ascendancy on the County Court. "They'll be sorry they voted for Hoover," Eb had announced to his family after the presidential election of 1928.

On the Board of Education. Kenneth Hart, who was county Superintendent of Schools in 1933 and 1934, remembers that the Democrats controlled the County Court at that time by a majority of 27 seats to 25.²⁴

The County Court picked the members of the Board of Education. There were seven seats on the School Board, and members served seven-year terms staggered so that a term expired every year. In 1928, the earliest year for which we have been able to find formal minute records, there were five Democrats on the Board,²⁵ and Democrats were nominated for vacancies every year through 1931. In the County Court session of 5 July 1927, "E. M. Sentelle was elected as a member of the County School Board to succeed S. J. Bowman, retiring member."²⁶

The School Board at that time, in the manner of other county boards then and since, performed a variety of administrative tasks. During the term of 1928-29, the Board of Education met in formal session 22 times. There were 13 meetings in July and August, 1928, alone.

Jobs were at a premium, and political considerations caused Board members to devote special attention to matters of personnel placement. On one occasion (23 August 1928), the Board placed a principal on motion by Eb Sentelle. The following day, Supt. George W. Hardin recommended another man for the same job. For reasons we can only surmise, Eb moved to accept the new nomination and, in effect, displace the man already named. The action failed to carry, however.²⁷ In 1928, the Board required all applicants for teaching positions to "possess a regular State Certificate . . . because of the great surplus of

²⁴ Kenneth C. Hart, Rt. 1, Aurawood Drive, Kingsport, Tennessee 37660. Interview on 9 April 1981.

²⁵ Dave Alexander, R. T. Kelley (Baileyton), William M. Reed (Mosheim), Eb Sentelle, and Quincy N. Styke (Mohawk). Democrat Ben J. Farnsworth succeeded E. M. Crum in 1929; Democrat J. F. Crabtree followed S. W. Doty (later County Judge) in 1930. From 1930 to 1932, the Democrats held all seven seats on the Board. T. H. Foreman replaced fellow Democrat Dave Alexander in 1931.

²⁶ **Greene County Court Minute Book 50**, p. 293; Oath recorded, *Ibid.*, p. 279. Election and oath on 5 July 1927.

²⁷ The principal was Ed Norton at Ottway School. Hardin recommended Robert Baker for the job the day after Norton had been placed.

Certified teachers this year."²⁸ Pressure for patronage and favoritism increased as the county sank into the Depression. In 1932, the Board restricted teaching applicants to one per family, "Owing to the great surplus of teachers."²⁹ At the annual organizational meeting on 7 July 1931, "A motion was made by B. J. Farnsworth and seconded by Q. N. Styke that E. M. Sentelle be elected as Chairman of the Board . . . Motion carried unanimously."³⁰ He continued as Chairman through the remainder of his term on the Board, to 30 June 1934.

Kenneth Hart remembers Eb as an active and energetic leader. He was a good politician who knew everyone in the county, Hart tells us. Eb Sentelle impressed his Superintendent as a "good organizer," and "always on the job." He had a special knack, says Hart, for selecting teachers who would fit well in a community. In the final months of his tenure on the Board, beginning in March, 1934, there is a marked deterioration in Eb's signature on the Board Minutes. Ken Hart recalls that the Chairman was seriously ill for several months during this period, and that he spent some time in the Takoma Hospital in Greeneville.³¹

Other political activities. The children remember that Eb made several trips to Nashville and Washington on political business. He was a strong admirer and active supporter of Sen. McKellar from Memphis, and Sen. Bachman from Chattanooga.³² The Simpson inlaws fell out with Eb on a matter of job patronage involving Sen. Bachman, who incidentally was a cousin of the family. When Flora decided that she wanted to keep the Post Office at Tusculum, her brother Will approached the Senator only to be told that Eb Sentelle had already recommended someone else for the position.³³

Odds and Ends

A number of stories and anecdotes have come to us from a variety of sources.

²⁸ **Greene County Board of Education Minute Book 1**, p. 10 (24 August 1928).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 196 (9 August 1932).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

³¹ ". . . about the time Henry had his appendectomy (about 15 June 1934)." (Kenneth C. Hart)

³² Kenneth D. McKellar (1869-1957), U. S. House (1911-1917), Senate (1917-1953); Nathan L. Bachman (1878-1937), Senate (1933-37).

³³ Eb nominated Elizabeth (Mrs. John) Waddell, the daughter of his friend and fellow Democrat, Bill Russell. Elizabeth was named to the post and held it for a short time. Sen. Bachman was a second cousin to the Simpsons.

"Which is the patient?" George Hardin had been Superintendent of Schools when Eb was on the County Board of Education, and the two of them passed many hours talking over school matters.

They must have become especially close, for Eb took George to Eastern State Hospital in Knoxville one time when George needed psychiatric treatment. The admissions officer spoke with them at length and finally had to ask, "Now, which of you is the patient?" The confusion of the official, innocent as it may have been, thereafter was related within the family as an item of droll humor.

Lost underwear. Charlie White the barber remembers that Eb took a weekly bath in the creek below his home. He usually changed his flannel underwear on these occasions, and one time he lost the soiled garments. Charlie says the underwear turned up the next week, however, when Eb again took his bath. He found that he had worn both pairs that week, the fresh underwear on top of the old.

Charlie declares the story is true, although no one else seems to remember it. Perhaps the incident was not such a remarkable one to Eb, if he did as others sometimes did in cold weather, and often wore more than one layer of insulation.

The Rustic Inn. The children insist that Eb was always a perfect gentleman, at least until after his term on the School Board ended. He kept a bottle of whiskey at home, but it was always locked in the safe -- until Jack wrote off and got the combination, unknown to his father. Eb was always disgusted with others who drank too heavily. But after he finished his time on the Board, Eb began to keep company with the crowd at the Rustic Inn.³⁴

Margaret Babb and her husband operated this tavern east of Greeneville. She had red hair, and may have encouraged Eb to restore his own hair color. He never dyed his hair before the Rustic Inn days. When Maggie questioned where he was going, Eb would sometimes tell her that he was, "Going to see my woman."

"You look like going to see a woman," Mag would exclaim in a disgusted tone. She had no use for the redhead at the Rustic Inn, and she probably suspected that Eb was giving hog meat, fruit, and other farm produce to his new companions.

A fondness for hog meat. Eb was especially fond of hog meat, and earned something of a reputation for his sausage, ham, bacon, and other hog products. In the folk wisdom of the neighborhood, you have never been to a real

³⁴ Situated on Tusculum Boulevard about where King Arthur's Court motel now stands. Some say it was built to catch the trade from a Civilian Conservation Corps camp on the hill across the road.

hog-killing until you have seen them slaughtered and dressed on Eb Sentelle's farm.



The Eb Sentelle Family (and a few cousins)

On the front porch of the Broyles home place (2 April 1916). (back, l to r) **Jack** (16), **Eb** (48), **Lucy** (21), Tulin Earnest, Gene Emerson, Ruth Emerson, **Henry** (22), Walter E. Weems (in front of Henry), (2nd row) Mrs. Fate Ellis, **Agnes** (11), **Mag** (40), Unice Finkle, **Macy** (19), **Bill** (7) (in front), Sam Broyles, (front) Clay Allen, and **Nannie** (5). (A flower may be seen on Clay Allen's head, placed there by Unice Finkle just before the picture was taken.)

One time Eb was confined at Takoma Hospital for an extended period. The hospital required a strictly vegetarian diet for both health and religious reasons, and Eb confided to Mag that he was starved for some ham. She dutifully slipped some "slabs" into his room, and shortly thereafter, the hospital staff became alarmed at irregularities in Eb's vital signs. The doctors labored over him at length to determine the reasons for the sharp jump in his blood pressure, and his accelerated pulse rate. The patient never offered an explanation and the signs eventually returned to normal. But to our knowledge Eb never again ate hog meat at the Adventist hospital.

His Death

Eb Sentelle, in his will dated 15 January 1947,³⁵ provided for his wife and son Bill to share all of the property after his death. Maggie could not transfer her share. Henry would hold it in trust for her, and upon her death her share would go to Nannie. Thus, all property would pass eventually to the two youngest children. In a codicil, Bill was obligated for a cash settlement of \$500 to Agnes, and Nannie a like amount to Macy. Henry and Lucy, the oldest children, received nothing. The father died at home about 4:30 on the morning of 22 July 1947. For more than a year he had been in ill health, and he spent most of the previous winter in a Greeneville hospital. He had been confined to bed for some four months at the time of his passing.

He was buried nearby at Greenwood where Nannie Broyles had been laid to rest 36 years earlier, and where their son Jack had been buried in 1928.

Eb and Nannie's Children

About Christmas, 1988, a local newspaper ran a story on the children of Eb and Nannie Broyles Sentelle. The article was well written, and so accurately described a lifetime of family relationships, that we include it at this point as it originally appeared.³⁶

. . . Every time I get caught in the middle of Christmas traffic, I want to run back to the fifties where things were slower and kinder. Sometimes, I just want to run out to Henry Sentelle's place. I was out at Henry's place the other day. He lives out at Afton. Henry turned 95 back in the early fall. All his younger sisters and a brother were there, too. When you leave the fast lane of Christmas shopping in 1988 and go to Henry's place, you get a whole new perspective of what's important and what's not. Henry is the older brother to a bunch of boys and girls who know more about Christmas than any of us simply because they have so much more experience than the rest of us.

Lovely Lucy, the oldest girl, turned 93 back in August.

Marvelous Macy hit 91 just after school started this fall.

Last spring, Auntie Agnes became 83 about the time she was planning and planting her garden.

³⁵ **Greene County Will Book 7 (1943-1955)**, pp. 144-146.

³⁶ Bob Hurley, "Sentelle Children Say Christmas Really Is for Kids From 1 to 95," **The Greeneville** (Tennessee) **Sun**, December 19, 1988, p. A-12.

Bashful Brother Bill, a man who never married but who has been like a father to more kids than he can count, is a mere 80. Neighborly Nannie is the baby of the family. She turned 78 last month, but she still thinks and acts like she's 28, so don't tell her any different.

When you add it all up, you have more than 520 years of combined human experiences. Think about that for a minute. To better understand the longevity of this hard-working family, consider the fact that Columbus didn't sail the ocean blue and discover the great American traffic jam until a mere 496 years ago.

The day that I found all six of them together at Henry's place was a day when the rest of the world had gone shopping. Instead of worrying about finding just the right stuff and paying for it with a credit card that has been used so much that it feels hot to the touch, the six Sentelle children were enjoying each other's company just like they always have and making sure that everybody's needs were being taken care of, just like they always have.

Can you imagine the relief I felt when we started talking about a Christmas celebration in the 1920s? I mean, I had just come from a place where the conversation had centered on Swatches with a capital S, video games with Japanese names that I wouldn't dare to spell, something new that had been seen on something called MTV, and common everyday blue jeans that have somehow turned into something besides comfortable britches.

There might be families who represent more years of the human experience, but I don't know them. I know these Sentelle people, and the fact that six of them represent 520 years is only part of the amazing story. In a day when families are not what they used to be, this one sticks out because it still sticks to the tried and true ways of caring and sharing and being together.

"We'd fight like cats and dogs as kids," Henry remembers, "but only amongst ourselves. Then we'd turn around and stick up for each other when we needed to."

The family didn't have to go to all that trouble of growing up during the Great Depression. They all grew up long before that. As Henry put it, "We were all used to hard times a long time before they became so popular."

The hard times might have made for some rough sledding for the family, but they also provided the kinds of experiences that glued six children into a tight-knit family, and the family has touched more of us in more ways than any of the six will ever know.

Elbert M. Sentelle, the father of the six, was called Bear. And for good reason. He was known to be a little grouchy on his bad days, like you'd expect a bear to be, but I think the nickname came because of the way he protected his little Sentelles. Have you ever seen how grumpy an old papa bear can be when it comes to the baby bears?

When I told the six that I'd like to put them in the paper, Marvelous Macy allowed that we couldn't do that because "we've never done anything worth putting in the paper."

While Macy is indeed a marvelous little lady, she is simply wrong on this score. The family has rung up a whole flock of success stories, far too many for this space. Besides, this piece is about Christmas and the magic that kids bring to it.

"They have always been incredibly supportive of each other," said Meri Lynne Mercer Wilhoit, Nannie's daughter and close observer of family doings. "And the older they get, the closer they seem to become."

So while the rest of us go a little crazy in the mad rush to create a world of merriment, the Sentelle children will celebrate Christmas much the same way they did back long before every store and every corner got its own Santa. It will be a simple observance of peace and love and good will, an old fashioned truth that they love to cling to, no matter how long it has been since they first heard about it.

*** * * * ***

We suspect that the Bear looks on with some satisfaction from that political paradise where jobs are plentiful and the campaigns never falter, where Mag and Nannie likewise rest from their cares and labors. "Well, now, girls," says Eb. "Guess we didn't do so bad at that!"