

PREFACE

"This stone here is for your great-great grandfather **Gideon Sentelle**, who was known in this neighborhood as 'the Squire.' And here beside him is **Rachel**. And here where it says '**Florence E. Jones**' -- that's **Aunt Betsy**."

My son **David** and I were standing in the cemetery at **Mt. Zion** on **Camp Creek**. I indicated to him where the old frame school had stood across from the Presbyterian church, and beyond that to where **Aunt Mary and Uncle Jim Sentelle** once lived.

"Dad," **David** asked, "why are you interested in this family history?"

There are several reasons. I neglected to share all of them with young **Dave** at the moment. He will know in time.

I told him that the research is a recreation. It is more permanent in its results than hunting or golf -- and much less expensive. I told him that circumstances had thrown so much material in my direction that I had to write to preserve it, to keep it from being lost again -- and perhaps this time beyond recovery.

But I neglected to tell him that these studies had extended my historical view. The **American Revolution**, the **Civil War**, the **First World War**, had become real to me. I fled from the British at **Camden** -- through the woods and swamps with the **North Carolina** militia. I struggled across the mountains of **Southwest Virginia** with the conscription fugitives in 1863. I felt the earth tremble in France when the "Old Hickory" boys from **Tennessee** broke the **Hindenburg Line** at **Bellicourt**.

And I have reached out to the extended family to find my own place in the greater scheme of things. Through the lives of people bound to me by ties of flesh and blood, I am no longer alone in the great struggle to endure. I find in this **simple record of ordinary people** an assurance that the human spirit transcends vicissitudes of time and chance. We have our separate entrances and exits on this mortal stage, but the family remains.

And this is our own personal story as a family, a record of who we are and what we have been. And, perhaps, where we are going.

I offer it now for its **humor** in the face of tragedy, for its **greatness** in mediocrity, and for its **triumph of spirit** in the face of failing strength and death.

I offer it with a wish that young **David**, or some other kinfolk, on some dark night may find the inspiration here to take heart and carry on in the sure knowledge that we are never alone.



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