

# —After nightfall—

## Strangers on mountain trail wary o

### Part 2

The family of L.E.M. "Bud" Payne and wife Eliza Bethany Payne, and their children, lived in a story-and-a-half log house the couple themselves had built about 1885, in the primeval forest of the Unicoi Mountains, in Monroe County, Tennessee, five miles south of Tellico Plains.

The 700 acres that the Paynes owned extended from the historic Murphy Turnpike back into the wilderness. The home itself stood beside the pike, a toll road between Tellico Plains and Murphy, N.C., across the mountain 34 miles to the south and east.

In the absence of traditional hotels in that sparsely populated section, the Payne home became a stopping place for travelers in the final years of the old century, and in the first years of this century.

Most of the travelers were men, and most came on horseback, although some came on foot or driving teams and riding in wagons.

One of the Payne children, Fred, born in 1890, remembers the era of the toll road, and the excitement its travelers sometimes brought to the Payne household.

Many came along after nightfall, and

in the custom of that time and place they would stand in the road near the house and give an exploratory yell: "Hel-LO, hel-LO."

Fred's father, Bud, would go to the door and peer through the darkness and ask, "What do you call your name?"

They'd tell him, if they were people of good intention, and they'd ask, hopefully, "What's the chance to get to stay all night?"

"How many is there of you?," Bud would ask. They'd tell, and most times he'd say, "Yes, I guess we can keep you."

"Then mother would have to begin to cook supper for them," Fred recalls. "We had probably already eaten, and she'd have to cook again. But they were always

mighty agreeable, my father and mother, in home affairs.

"While she cooked supper he would take the men and help put up their horses — feed them. Their price to keep a man and his horse, both, all night long, was 25 cents. I can remember that.

"That was supper and breakfast for the man, and stable and feed for the horse. He'd put down hay enough for the night, and he'd put corn in the feedbox. My father treated livestock mighty good," Fred says.

Cooking and eating after dark were by the light of an oil lamp, which burned what in those days was called "coal oil." Ten cents a gallon was the price of coal oil at the only store anywhere close, Tip Tate's general store and grist mill on Conasauga Creek.

Whether it was for company, or themselves, there was no lamp lit much after supper was over. "We'd blow the lamp out to save on coal oil. To make light we'd throw rich pine knots in the fireplace," Fred says.

The Payne children almost always welcomed the overnight presence of the strangers, Fred recalls. In the colder months there'd be a wide circle of family and travelers around the fire in the big stone fireplace downstairs.

"They'd tell tales, you know, till bedtime. We'd get our imaginations stirred up.

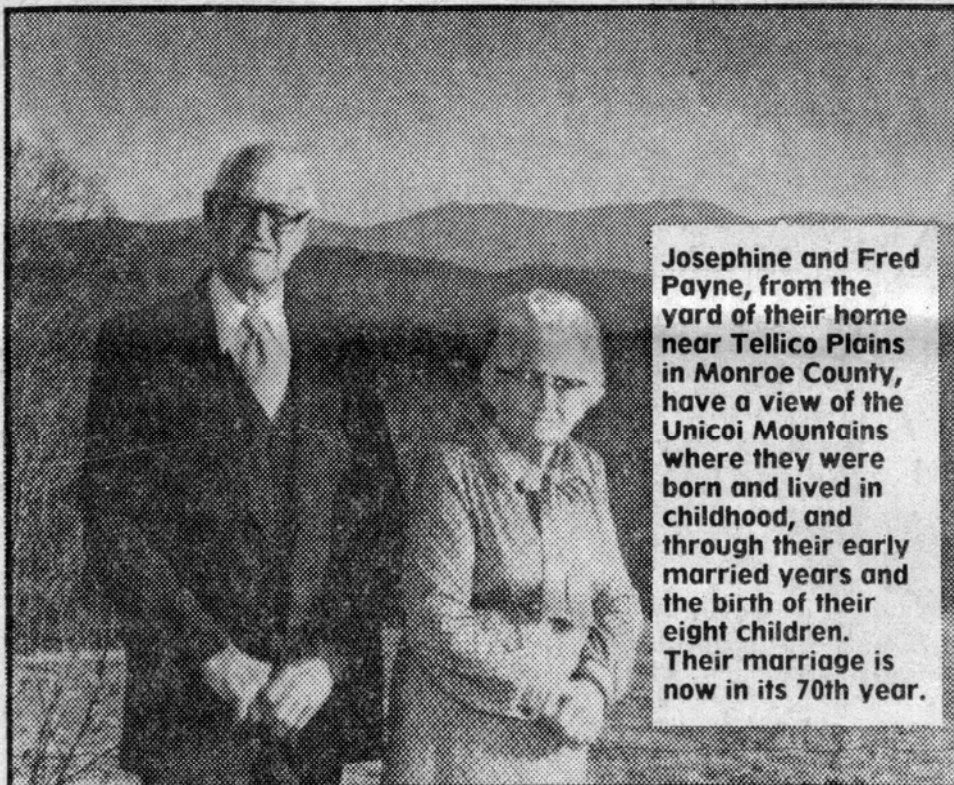
"I remember one fellow that came along and told about walking the Waucheesi Trail, another pioneer path through the mountains. It was a dim trail, hard to follow, and the men who did had to be good woodsmen.

"The Waucheesi Trail was only for men on foot," Fred says. Men on horseback wouldn't attempt it. The trail got its name from Waucheesi Mountain, which it skirted, on the Tennessee-North Carolina border. There is now a fire lookout tower on its summit.

Fred says one of the attractions of the Waucheesi Trail was that there was no toll, or charge, for the use of it, while there was a toll levied on travelers of the Murphy Turnpike.

Beginning at Tellico Plains the toll pike headed south along the general direction of what is now Tennessee Route 68. The tollgate was about 11 miles south of Tellico Plains, and about six miles south of the Payne home. It was at the foot of the main ridge of the Unicoi Moun-

### Tennessee Travels



Josephine and Fred Payne, from the yard of their home near Tellico Plains in Monroe County, have a view of the Unicoi Mountains where they were born and lived in childhood, and through their early married years and the birth of their eight children. Their marriage is now in its 70th year.



# of knocking on doors



Toll collector for the Murphy Turnpike early in the century lived in this house at the foot of Unicoi Mountain about 11 miles south of Tellico Plains. The road ran past the house, between it and the rail fence in the picture, and there was a gate across the road, near the end of the porch at right. The gate would be opened to allow a traveler to pass after he had paid the fee. Picture was made Nov. 14, 1926, after the house had been abandoned as a residence.

tains, which in the language of Fred's youth were spoken of in the singular, Unicoi Mountain.

The last toll collector Fred remembers was Hugh Saddler. He maintained the road, cleared away fallen trees, filled washouts and otherwise kept it passable for the people and conveyances of his day, which did not yet include automobiles.

Fred says it is his understanding that Saddler, in return for keeping the road up, was entitled to keep the fees he collected at the tollgate.

Many of the strangers who came to the Payne home for food and lodging were northbound travelers directed there by the toll collector. Some who might have pushed on to Tellico Plains that night didn't, because of Eliza Payne's skill in the kitchen, and because of the honey, from Bud Payne's "bee yard," that was on the table at every meal.

Bud had as many as 85 stands of bees at one time. They were patent-style gums, which Bud built, with racks and supers. He sold some of the honey to

travelers, but took more of it by wagon to Madisonville, where he sold it to merchants for 10 cents a pound.

"I've run many a footrace when his bees'd get after me," Fred says. "I'd be trying to help him when he'd be working in the beehives.

"He'd have me using the smoker, and when a bee'd get under my veil, I'd sell out, doctor. I'd get out of there a-flying. He'd laugh at me and get me to come back.

"His bees seemed to know him. He'd have him a place in the shade where he'd lie down to rest right among them a-working, and they'd never bother him at all.

"But a stranger'd go in there, and he'd have to get out a-flying, a lot of times."

Some of the stories told around the fire at night might be Bud's own tales, when a stranger would be short of words.

"My father loved to hunt mighty well," Fred says. "I remember he would tell people stopped there overnight how he had killed as many as 12 deer in one

winter, which went a long way toward feeding his family.

"I remember, back when I can first remember, that there was a lot of wild game in that country. We'd see turkeys in the fields, and raccoons would come in and eat the corn up, and he'd get right angry and take his dogs and chase them down and kill eight or 10 at a time, sometimes."

Fred says his father seldom had anything to say about the legendary gold of Coker Creek, three miles to the south, and never did appear to desire to own any land there, at least not for the purpose of wanting to mine gold.

Bud Payne did know the history of Coker Creek, and in knowing it also realized that of the hundreds who prospected for gold there, almost none had profited from it.

*Although his father shunned it, Fred and wife Josephine did own 160 acres on Coker Creek 60 years ago, and were eyewitness to the biggest, most expensive gold mining operation ever attempted on Coker Creek. With their help, we will return to an account of it sometime soon.*