

Schoolmaster on muleback answers call to Macedonia

Part 1

The year was 1909 and S.J. Parks was superintendent of Monroe County schools. Frederick Condon Payne from Coker Creek was an applicant for a teaching job.

"We can use you," Parks told Fred, who was then 19 years old.

"Where?," Fred asked.

Parks was also a Baptist minister and he replied by paraphrasing the Bible:

"There's a call that says come over into Macedonia and help us. I'm going to send you over there, to Macedonia School."

"Where is it?," Fred asked.

"It's 20 miles or more above Tellico Plains, back in the mountains, at a place called Rafter," Parks told him.

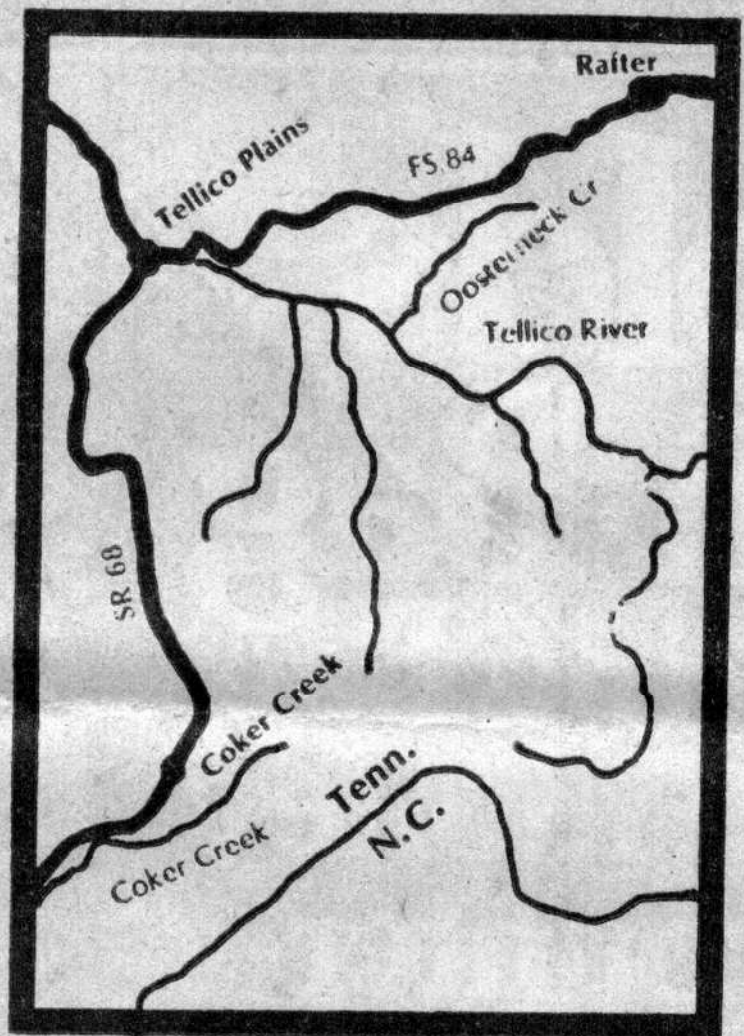
Fred journeyed from Madisonville, the Monroe County seat where he received his teaching appointment, back to the home of his parents on Coker Creek.

His mother, Eliza Bethany Lenderman Payne, packed a suitcase with the clothing she thought he'd be needing. In the same bag Fred packed the books he'd need for teaching all eight grades.

Fred's father, Lemuel Enos Marion "Bud" Payne, offered to ride at least part of the distance with his son to help him find the way through the unmarked woods.

"It was July, and most schools started in July in that time," Fred recalls.

"My father had a pair of mules, and we put a saddle on each one and left



*Mr. F. C. Payne
Rafter*

Tenn

"My father had a pair of mules, and we put a saddle on each one and left Coker Creek before daylight. We went some trails through the mountains, away from Tellico Plains, back across Tellico River, to a place called the Canebrake."

Bud Payne stayed with his son until they had crossed the river, to lessen the chance of wetting his books and clothing. They forded main Tellico River where Oosterneck Creek flows into it from the north, from the direction of Rafter. (Fred says it was "Roosterneck" Creek back then, and he doesn't know how it became "Oosterneck" on modern maps.)

Bud then pointed to a prominent ridge above them and gave his son this parting advice:

"Now I've never been to Rafter, myself. But you take that leading ridge there and it'll take you back into that country somewhere.

"Then go to inquiring and you can find the school."

Fred recalls that his father then turned and headed back through the river, riding one mule and leading the other.

"I put a stick through the handle of my suitcase, so I could carry it across my shoulder," he says, "and took off on foot up that long, steep ridge.

"I was wore out when I finally came to a big road, what they called a big road in those days.

"But I continued on until I came to a church and a schoolhouse, and I knew within reason then that I had found Macedonia School.

"I went on up the road a short distance and found a house, and a store nearby, but there was nobody there.

"I sat down and waited then until about noon and saw a wagon coming with a man and his wife and two children," Fred continues.

Fred introduced himself:

"My name's Fred Payne. I'm the new teacher of this school. Are you Mr. Barr?"

"Yes, my name is Dave Barr," the man on the wagon replied.

"Well, can I spend the night with you? Maybe you'll let me board with you?" Fred said.

"I guess we could do that," Barr told him.

Fred taught there for six months, the customary term in a country school. His pay was \$30 a month, and he gave the Barrs \$10 a month for room and board.

"Saturdays, when there wasn't any school, I worked in his store. He paid me, I think, a dollar a day to do that, while he'd go to town to do his wholesale buying," Fred recalls.

The storekeeping would turn out to be a more valuable experience for Fred than the teaching was. He taught school for only two more years, but he has been in some kind of store business for most of the 70 years since.

The school at Rafter had 60 pupils in one room. Fred found it to be "quite a day's work" to instruct classes in all eight grades every day, with no assistant.

He taught there only the one term, and for the following year was assigned a school closer to home, near Coker Creek. And his pay was raised to \$35 a month.

During his second year of teaching,

and close to the end of the term, on January 29, 1911, Fred was married to Josephine Tilley. She was three months older than 13 years old, and he was not quite 21.

When the school term ended, the paychecks stopped, and the Paynes remember that they borrowed grocery money from Fred's father. "When school started again we owed him \$35, and of course we were able to pay him back," Fred says.

That summer he had done some farming, and Josephine would carry water out to where he was plowing, so he wouldn't have to waste time going to the house every half-hour or so.

Josephine was the keeper, by agreement, of their small "savings," which at the time of the spring plowing totaled 75 cents — three quarters.

When she came to the field with another bucket of water she sat at the edge of the plowed area to wait for Fred to swing back that way with the mule team. While she waited she lost the money, although she didn't miss it until Fred plowed over the place where she had been sitting.

"She liked to cried her eyes out. But she kept scratching with a stick until she found all three of those 25-cent pieces. How she ever found them I don't know," Fred says.

Later that same year, after school started, their money supply improved, and they began saving to buy a horse and buggy.

"We had D.T. Bohon, a company up in

Kentucky, to build us a little buggy, and to fit it with harness for a little horse we had got hold of. So we began living in style then," Fred says.

Josephine says it was in 1912 that they bought the little country store, from Fred's brother, George Sanford Payne.

The store was about five miles above Tellico Plains in the direction of Coker Creek. In the store was the "Paynes" postoffice, so named by Sanford when he became the first postmaster four or five years previously, and had to suggest a name for it.

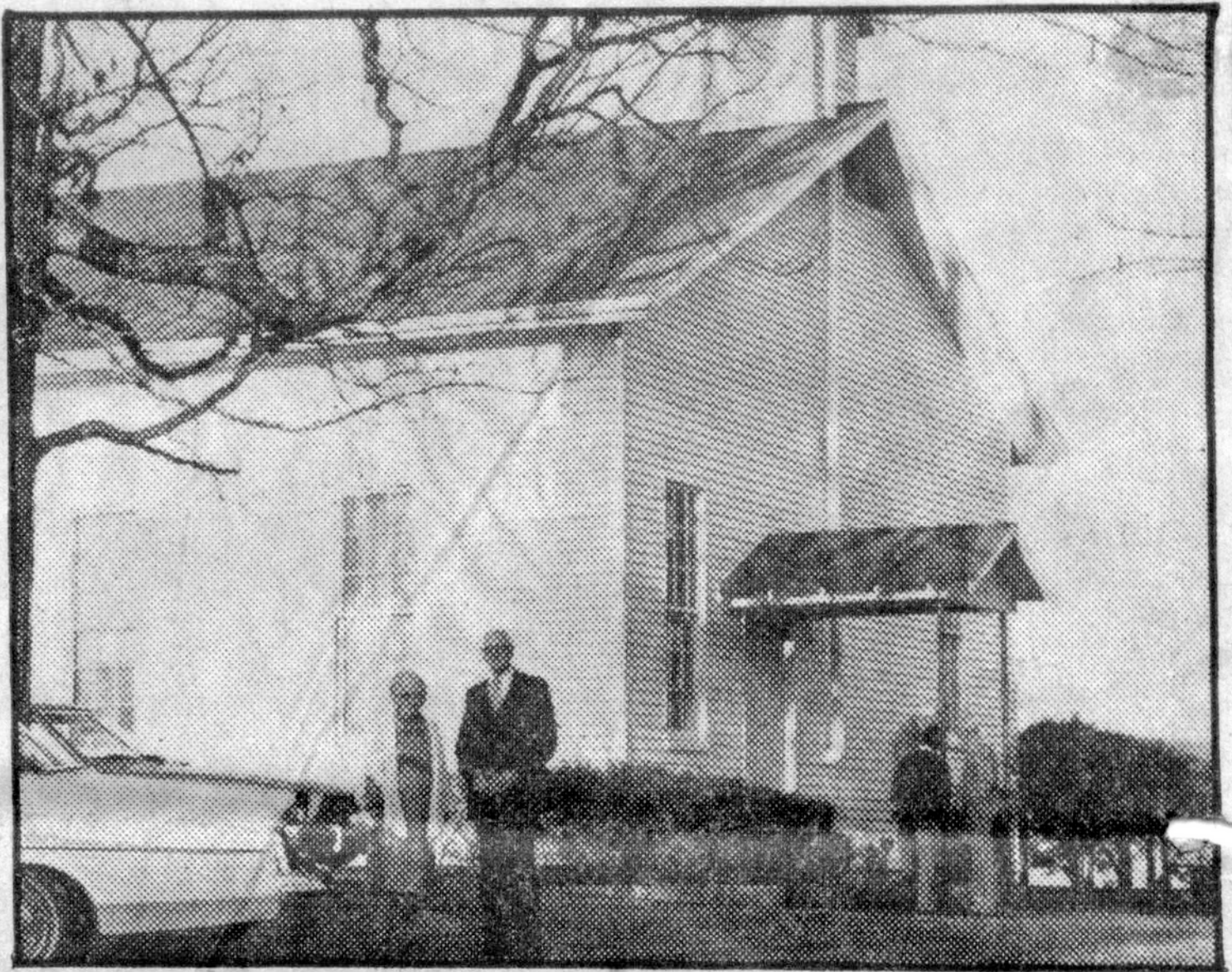
Now that Fred and Josephine were running the store, Fred made application to be named postmaster, and it was approved.

Two years later he found it much more difficult to close the postoffice. He did send in his resignation, but was told by Washington that he couldn't resign until he found somebody qualified to take his place.

Or, failing that, the department told him he could begin a petition to close Paynes Postoffice. Then if everybody who got mail there signed the petition, it could be closed.

He surprised himself by getting the signature of every patron of Paynes Postoffice, and it was then closed, forever. Fred and Josephine believe the year was 1914.

(This will be continued with the story of gold, but not enough to make anybody rich, on Coker Creek.)



Bottom left photo, for more than 70 years Fred Payne has kept a letter mailed to him by his father, L.E.M. Payne, while Fred was on his first teaching job in one-room Macedonia School at Rafter, in the Unicoi Mountains, and now within the bounds of Cherokee National Forest. Note that the envelope is postmarked "Paynes, Tenn.," a postoffice named for the family. It was closed more than 60 years ago, and while it lasted served a community about five miles from Tellico Plains toward Coker Creek, in Monroe County. Above photo, Fred and Josephine Payne (recent picture, in left foreground) almost a half-century ago gave part of the land for this, Druid Hills Baptist Church near Tellico Plains. They and their children helped build the church, and the closed belfry houses a bell, still tolled for every church occasion, which Fred salvaged from a steam locomotive that once plied the nearby mountains. The couple returned to Monroe County last year after 30 years at Inverness, Fla., where Fred was manager of a grocery chain warehouse. Below left, map of Fred Payne's travels to his first teaching position shows the relative locations of Coker Creek, where his family lived; Rafter, where Macedonia School stood; and Tellico Plains, nearest town to either mountain community. Coker Creek flows into Hiwassee River. Most of the rest of the country here is part of the Tellico River watershed. It is all mountainous, with elevations to 5,400 feet.