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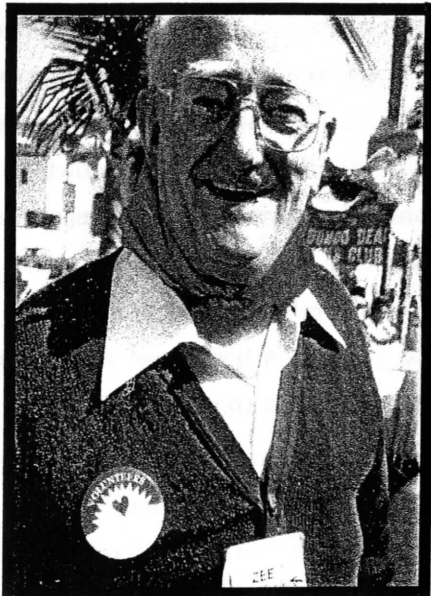
## GROWING UP IN WATER VALLEY, KENTUCKY

By Zee W. Pique

I was born January 29, 1912, at our home in Water Valley at the northwest corner of Marshall and Church Streets. Marshall Street was named after Marshall Barnes, the landowner who lived at the end of the street at the top of the hill north of the Water Valley High School. Church Street was so named for the Methodist Church, just east of our home, the Presbyterian, just south, and the Baptist, just west of our home.

My father's father was Harrison Pigue, the Water Valley City Judge for many years. My father's name was George, but everyone called him "Judge" from his boyhood nickname of "Little Judge." Everyone in the family called the Judge "Pa." He was very serious. I don't remember ever seeing him smile. By contrast, my mother's father, Will Weaks, was always smiling and was a very happy man.

Water Valley had around 400 people in the 1920s. During the post-World War I depression in 1921, many people went to Detroit to work for the auto manufacturers. It was said that there were more people in Detroit from Water Valley than were in Water Valley. The only people I knew who drew regular wages were the Illinois Central Railroad station agent Sonny Williams; post-mistress Myrtle Armstrong; mail carriers Porter Pillow and Lee Boyd. Others had their own businesses, share-cropped or lived off money from their Detroit families. The Brooks Brothers from Paducah drove a car to Detroit about every day to take Water Valleyans to and from Detroit.



Zee Pique: 1998

The Illinois Central Railroad had a single line through Water Valley from Fulton to Paducah. There was a side track for about a half mile to allow meeting of trains. At 7:05 A.M. the "accommodation" arrived from the south carrying passengers, express and mail. Around 8:00 A.M. people would go to the post office to pick up their mail. Some affluent patrons rented a box so they could get their mail at any time. Others had to wait

until the service panel was opened. Mail was delivered only in the county by Rural Free Delivery.

At 8:15 A.M. "Whiskey Dick" arrived from Mayfield with passengers and express. Around 2:30 P.M. a freight train, "The Local," arrived from Fulton with store supplies and other freight. Baboo Thurmond, a clerk in Uncle George Yates' grocery store, would often reply to a customer's question, "We are fresh out, but we expect some more in on the 'Local.'"

At 5:15 P.M. "Whiskey Dick" would return from Fulton, and at 6:10 P.M. the "Accommodation" would arrive from Mayfield with passengers and mail. Again there was a social gathering to "meet the train" and then go to the post office to pick up the mail.

The railroad ran north and south, creating a division between the two sides of the business district. There were three crossings: one just north of the depot, one located one mile north and one a quarter mile south. There were no gates or crossing lights. Other passenger and freight trains went through town at speeds above seventy miles an hour. One Sunday morning mail-carrier Lee Boyd, driving a 1924 Chevrolet Sedan containing his wife and one-year-old baby, was hit as he crossed the track in front of a fast train. The car was demolished. Mrs. Boyd was instantly killed, but the baby was thrown through the air, knocked in the depot door, knocked over the pot-bellied stove and was not seriously injured. Lee Boyd and his child lived for many years with no after effects.

[Here the writer's cousin Frances Williams Pennington interpolates: *I was there the day this happened. It was a Sunday about 12:30 P.M. The first "streamlined" train, a large silver-covered train that looked like a bullet, was to come through town. Everyone was there to see this marvel! Mr. Boyd, who was somewhat deaf, came down the road and drove right across the tracks in front of the oncoming train. Everyone was yelling for him to stop, but later he said he thought they were telling him it was O.K. to cross. The car-train wreck happened in June of 1935.*]

On the east side of the railroad from the north were the Pirtle Hotel, Arnett's Grocery, the city jail, McCarver's Blacksmith Shop, The Bull Pen, Yates' Grocery, Thompson's Flour Mill and Sawmill. On the west side from the north were a barber shop, the Ford dealer, Weaks' Drug Store, Water Valley Bank, Tarpley's Grocery, Cameron & Eaker Dry Goods, Roy Weaks' Dry Goods, Orvin Weaks' Deli, Wayne Edwards' General Store, Ben Bennett's General Store, the Water Valley Post Office, a coal yard and cattle pens. Years later the new quarters for the post office replaced the barber shop. Starting with Tarpley's Grocery there was one big front porch under a tin roof supported by fifteen foot-high, two-inch thick iron poles. Town boys used these for exercise, seeing who could swing around them the greatest number of times before setting a foot to the

porch floor. They also timed the fastest shinny to the top and the climb down. [FWP: *We girls would skate down the length of the porch, grab a pole and swing out over something before dropping back on the porch--very dangerous, but a lot of fun.*] Years later, when Orvin Weaks vacated his store, it was converted into a gymnasium, with trapeze bars, rings, rope climbs, etc. Orvin and Roy Weaks were my Mother's brothers. Harry Weaks of the Weaks' Drug Store was her cousin.

In front of the drug store, Tarpley's Grocery Store and Edwards' General Store, there were both gas pumps and hitching rails. In those days the operator worked a handle back and forth to pump the gasoline up into a ten-gallon glass tank marked in gallons. The hose put into the car tank let the gas flow down per the markings on the glass. The gas tank in the Model-T Ford was under the driver's seat. The driver had to get out, remove the seat, take off the tank cap, put a measuring stick down into the tank and read the number of gallons there to determine how many gallons to put in. Gasoline was eighteen cents a gallon and came in only one grade.

At Halloween, the store fronts became a battlefield. Teenagers armed with roman candles, firecrackers, cap pistols and torpedoes would wage war on each other. Luckily, no serious damage resulted. One Halloween some boys disassembled Enoch Morris' brand-new wagon and reassembled it on top of the Depot. He was furious. It was the custom to flip over the privies of certain "sour-pusses," and several of them hired watchmen, but the boys managed to turn them over by distracting the guards.

Every house had an outside privy except Dr. Bard's. He installed a septic tank and inside toilet which became the talk of the town. Privies were sized as a one-holer, a two-holer, or other. The biggest one I saw was the four-holer for the girls at the school. The boys had only a two-holer. They didn't need a larger one because they did all their "number one business" outside anyway. Nobody had toilet paper. Most used corn cobs: one box of red cobs and a box of white cobs to see whether a person needed to use an additional red cob. Later, Sears-Roebuck catalogs were added, but they went into disfavor when they started using slick paper.

Dr. Bard had the meanest-looking bulldog in his backyard. No Halloween trick-or-treater ever bothered him. I admired Dr. Bard very much. He was always cool-headed. One time I saw him, in an emergency, saw off the leg of a man who had been run over by a freight train near the depot. He used a butcher saw from Yates' Store after giving the man a drink of whiskey from the Bull Pen. Because the man had lost so much blood, there wasn't time to take him to the operating table. He had no anesthetic other than the booze and was sewed up with a leather awl from the blacksmith shop.

We boys played "Follow the Leader." The leader would do increasingly more dangerous stunts until his followers chickened out. The favorite arena was the railroad siding, jumping from freight car to freight car, over big logs on flat cars and from increasing heights all the way to the ground.

Some boys would put pennies on the railroad tracks to have the trains flatten them to twice their size. Boys just becoming teenagers "arrived" when they could jump over both sets of tracks. Later they would try to jump up onto the Depot's express truck (a four-wheel dray for loading and unloading packages from the trains). Roy McNeil and I were the only ones who could do that backwards.

Another pastime was riding sapling trees. We would climb up thirty feet to the top of a sapling and jump sideways, riding the tree to the ground. If I did not time it right, I could be carried back into the air. My cousin Carter Hunter Yates was frustrated at this sign of the "country boy's" superiority over "city boys." Once in a liar's contest he said, "That's nothing. Let me tell you what I did day before yesterday night. After that his nickname was "Day-Before-Yesterday-Night."



ZW Pique Grandfather, Harrison Gibbs Pique

Other popular pastimes included pitching dollars in front of the drug store. Similar to horseshoes, two men at a two-inch hole in the dirt would each pitch a silver dollar at a hole its size twenty feet away. The winner made the toss closest to the hole in case the coin did not go into the hole. Later, in hard times, two-inch iron washers were used. Another game involved pitching pennies. The one whose penny was closest to the sidewalk "crack" claimed all the pennies. A gambling game was popular with the youngsters. A cigar box would have a hole in the top a little larger than a marble. Dropping a marble from waist-high and trying to drop it through the hole was the game. The box owner kept all marbles that missed the hole, but paid the dropper five marbles for each marble he dropped into the hole.

An athletic game called "One and Over" was very prevalent. All players would jump from a line in the dirt. The shortest jumper was "Down." The longest jumper was "Leader." "Down" would stoop over in front of the line. "Leader" would station "Down" out as far as "Leader" thought he could run, then hit the line and leap over "Down's" back. If everyone made the jump, the distance increased until someone failed, who then became "Down." Roy McNeil, Shorty Owen and I were the champions.

On the east side of the tracks just past the last house to the north was an alley leading into the old pottery mill. Back of the mill a creek ran from south to north parallel to the railroad just back of the houses. The boys' swimming hole, "Old Goose," was right behind the pottery mill. No one had bathing suits, but we were hidden by bushes. We had two slides down the mud bank into the water. They were called "slick-asses." One day several girls claimed they sneaked in there and took Brownie snapshots of the buck-naked boys, but we never saw any pictures.

My Uncle Jimmy Williams had a blacksmith shop at the back of his property. I spent many days there learning to work iron. His specialty was horseshoeing, and people came from miles around to have him shoe their horses and mules. One day a particularly ornery mule kicked Uncle Jimmy right through the siding of his shop. He came back in, picked up a hammer and hit the mule between the eyes, dropping him to his knees. The mule then straightened up and gave him no more trouble. Uncle Jimmy said, "You've got to get their respect."

My mother's younger sister Millie Weaks married Ode Thompson, who was the son of my father's sister Dora, so Ode was my first cousin on my father's side and my uncle on my mother's side. Their son Romulus Thompson is my first cousin and my first cousin once removed. When Romulus was a boy in Water Valley, he was riding a horse one day with Uncle Warner Thompson. When they were riding around the Depot, an engine whistle scared the horse. He jumped and broke the saddle strap

causing both of them to fall off and hit the ground. Romulus was unconscious for two days. Warner was bawled out for not taking care of "Boy," Romulus' nickname.

Later they moved to Paducah, where I would visit them every summer. Once Aunt Millie served meat loaf, a dish I had never heard of. I thought it was wonderful and asked for the recipe for my mother to use. Uncle Ode was quite a kidder. He took me up on top of the tallest building in town (the ten-story bank building at Fourth and Broadway) and pointed out "his" streetcars down below and then to "his" steamboat on the Ohio River. He said, "I'll prove to you that the Captain will obey my orders." When he saw two puffs of steam come out of the boat's whistle, he said, "I told him to toot his whistle twice when he saw me wave my hands twice at 11:00 A.M." He then waved his hand twice just in time for us to hear the two whistles, which of course took that long to reach us.

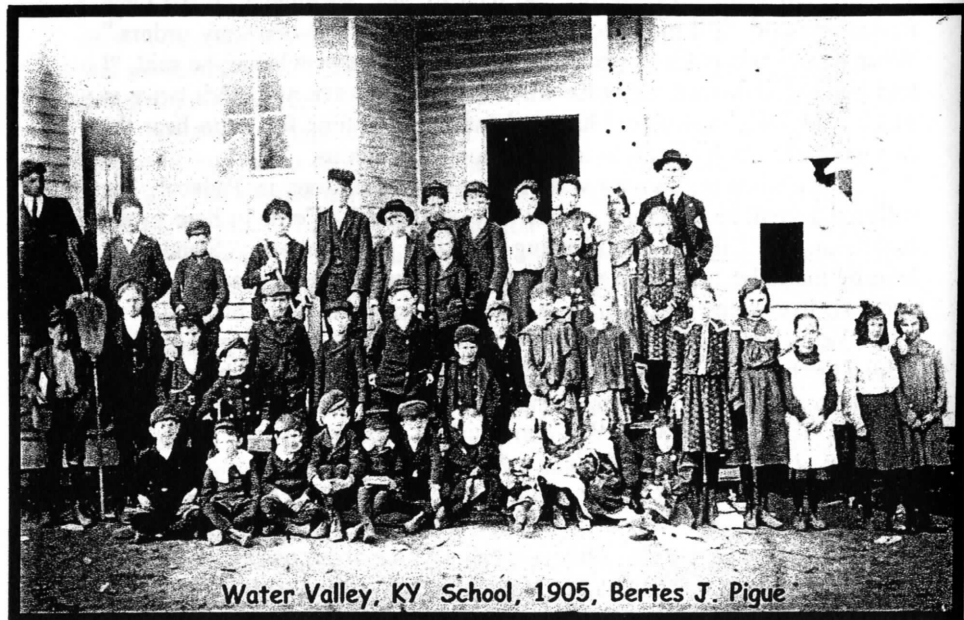
Once when my mother was visiting the Thompsons in Paducah, she suffered a small bleeding cut on her face. Ode said, "Come in here to the bathroom, and I'll stop the bleeding with this septic pencil. Stand over here by the toilet because you'll want to use it when the septic burns your cut." He lived to be ninety-three, a person who had fun all of his life.

Years later during my teens, Will Mullins built a small grocery just behind the bank. In those days my father would buy a stalk of bananas and hang it from our ceiling in the kitchen. At the store bananas cost five cents each. [FWP: *My Dad, Mike Williams, told me about the worst "lickin'" he ever had. His Dad, Jimmy Williams, bought a stalk of bananas in October and hung them in a dark closet so they would be ripe for Christmas. The only trouble was that when Christmas came and the closet was opened, there was only a bare stalk. Mike had eaten all the green bananas.*]

A local joke was that Water Valley had a lot of animals. There was Tom Lamb, Bernie Campbell (camel) and Judge Pigue, all neighbors. Another was "Water Valley had the biggest house in Graves County. It covered three acres: Ed Eaker, wife Tina Eaker and daughter Oscella Eaker. [FWP: *My grandmother Nanny Pigue Williams told me that when she was in school, the teacher called the roll by last names only and thought it was a good joke to seat the children so that he could call out "Little, Brown, Short, Pigue."*]

And everyone had a nickname: For example, Bad-Eye Colley, Shine Davis, Bear Aldridge, Cop Pennecost, Cap Owen, Coon Scott, Little Coon Scott, Eater Crass, Hoodie Pigue, Peanuts Owen, Chicken Johnson, Fifty Hall, Butcher Cloyer, Fatty Cloyer, Footsie Stokes, Short Douthitt, Gip Latta, Baboo Thurmond, Monkey Tibby, Brother Holland and Dutch Bomar. My cousin Oliver Pigue got the name "Hoodie" through his actions at the movie show. It was located in the old Baptist Church building between Dr. Weaks' and Dr. Hamlett's offices on the west side of the

railroad. It later moved over to the building occupied by the Bull Pen. Several reels of black and white silent films would be shown, followed by a one-reel comedy, then a one-reel serial suspense film like "The Perils of Pauline," which always ended in a horrible situation, so the patron wanted to come to the next show to see how the hero or heroine got out of a dilemma. One such series was "The Hooded Terror." Oliver would sit down front and yell out, "Look Out! He's behind the tree! He's about to get you!" Thereafter, he was called "Hoodie."



There was no pool hall for billiards and no dance hall. Those activities were considered sinful. But across the tracks was the Bull Pen run by my father's brother Bob Pigue as a "hang-out" for the men. It served sandwiches, beer and soda pop to the regulars who played "Rook" on the back porch. One day, Uncle Bob was regaling the group with his latest hunting trip story. He said, "I chased that animal up a tree, and it glared down at me. It had the head of a mountain lion, shoulders of a baboon, hands of a monkey and the tail of a lion. I don't know what it was!" Various people expressed their opinion as to what he had seen. Baboo Thurmond said, "I'll tell you what you saw, Bob. What you saw was just a damn lie!"

Outside news, including World Series game scores, came in by telegraph. Line scores were marked on the bank's windows with Bon Ami



and added at the end of each half inning. Men were lined up in front of the bank and cheered their teams. The same thing was done for championship prize fights.

Upstairs over the barber shop lived Dick Hall, his wife Eula and son Bert. Over the drugstore was the Masonic Temple. Over Bennett's Grocery was the Odd Fellows Hall, which doubled on Sunday as the Christian Church, which was known then usually as the "Campbellite or Church of Christ. Methodists were known, too, as the "Wesleyites" from their originator.

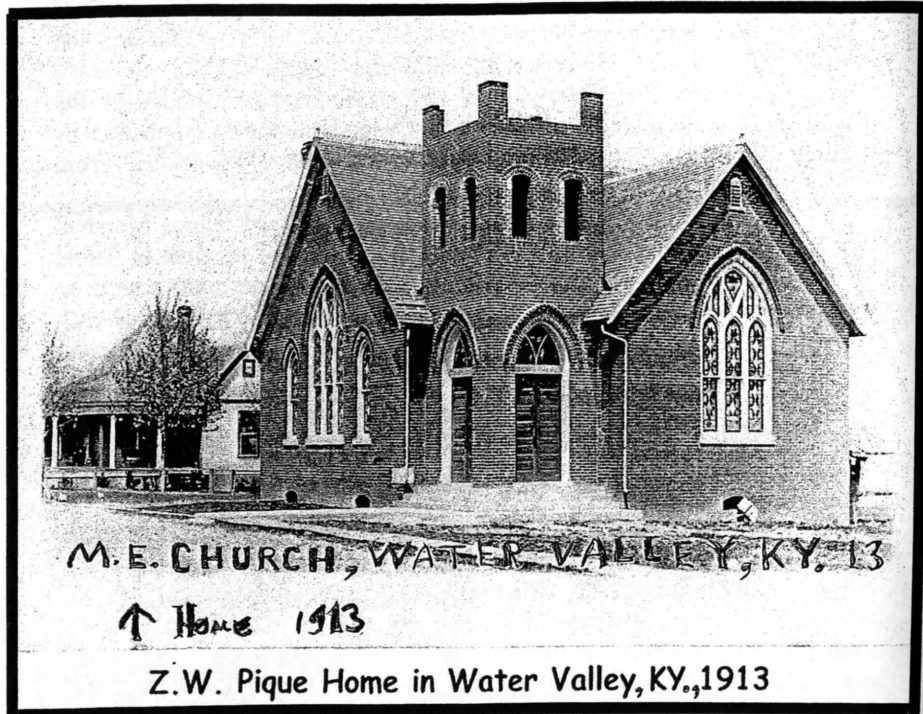
Dr. Oliver M. Johnson and his wife Molly lived across Marshall Street from the Methodist Church. He was way ahead of his time in "mind over matter" control of illnesses. He paid me twenty-five cents a week to take his cow about a mile to the pasture each morning and back home each night. He paid me ten cents to put four different vegetable colorings on dough pills the size of an aspirin and bake them in an oven. "Johnson's Red Medicine" would cure anything if it was "rubbed on" or swallowed. Mrs. McCarver came every Monday to buy twenty-one pills, one of which she took religiously with each meal. She vowed they cured her rheumatism.

Zoo Moss returned to Water Valley with her fourteen-year-old son Harold after many years in Detroit. She announced that she was giving a dance at her house on Monday night for all the local youngsters to get acquainted with Harold. My father's brother, Uncle Duncan Pigue, was the Methodist minister. He came down and stood at her gate, Bible in hand, and "preached" everyone away.

He was called "Grand-Pap" Thompson by nearly everyone. My grandfather was very religious and the biggest financial supporter of the Methodist Church. At Wednesday night prayer meetings, he would pray aloud for an hour, summarizing the day's activities, including the condition of his horses, his cows and his dogs. No one objected, and kids welcomed the chance to snooze. But there was a game that kids played with the songbooks. One would show the song title "Where Shall We Meet?" and the other would show "In The Garden." The Methodist, Presbyterian and Baptist churches all had "prayer meeting" on Wednesday nights. A common "old wives" tale was that one church choir would be singing "Will There Be Any Stars In My Crown?" while another choir would be replying, "No, Not One, No, Not One."

Some kinds of Methodists believed they could "backslide," so every years they would hold a revival meeting with an imported preacher and singer for an "all-day preaching and dinner on the ground." My cousin Ollie Thompson toured the surrounding states as a revival singer. One year a Brother Culpepper was the revivalist. I remember he said, "Stop taking the Lord's name in vain. If you want to curse, use my name." All

the smart-aleck boys began saying, "Culpepper you, you Culpeppering Culpepper!" He made quite an impression.



On November 11, 1918, the World War I Armistice was signed, and church bells rang all over America. I was six and one-half years old when my cousin Allie Pique took me up in the third story bell tower of the Presbyterian Church to ring the bell. We had to climb two ladders to get up there. The window openings on all four sides were not protected, and he fell out onto the church roof one story down. My mother heard me yelling from across the street and came over, but she couldn't climb the ladders. Allie "came to" and brought me down to a tongue-lashing from my mother.

Unlike the Presbyterian and Baptist Churches, the Methodist Church was governed by a "Presiding Elder" in the Southern Conference. It was his custom to have the minister serve only one year in a church and then move to another church. Our Methodists bought the adjacent Wayne Thompson house when he moved to Florida and made it their parsonage. The salary was very low, so several times a year a "pounding" took place as membership presented the minister with pounds of meat, such as sausages, hams, vegetables, canned goods and other gifts.

"Children's Day" was an annual affair at the Methodist Church. Dr. Johnson's wife, Mollie, was the major-domo. She decided on the program and assigned roles to the children to sing or recite. She invited me to sing, but I told her I couldn't carry a tune. She said, "Nonsense! It's a matter of being properly taught." But after my tryout, she admitted she was wrong.

Black citizens in that time had their separate schools, churches and waiting rooms at the Depot. Their preacher was a circuit-rider. No one church could afford to pay the preacher. One of them, a Brother Cooley, was praised by the Mayfield *Messenger*. The reporter asked him his secret. He replied, "I tells them what I's gonna tell 'em, I tells them why I's gonna tell 'em what I's gonna tell 'em, I tells 'em and then I tells 'em what I told 'em!" I have used his secret in every talk I've made over the years. It works.

No one had Christmas trees at home so the three principal churches took turns hosting a community tree. A tall tree would be erected in the church the day before Christmas Eve. Next morning volunteers would trim and decorate the tree. All day people would bring in wrapped and tagged presents which were hung on the tree. At 7:00 P.M. the services began. Six people would take down the presents and hand them to Tom Lamb, who would call out the name. When the recipient raised a hand, volunteers delivered the present. Popularity was judged by the number of times a name was called. Next day the tree was moved out into the churchyard, where the younger boys played in it.

People were fiercely partisan in their religion. Blanche Aldridge was always trying to convert my mother from Methodism to the Baptist faith to "keep her from going to hell." Mother told Blanche, "I'm a Methodist born and a Methodist bred, and when I die, I'll be a Methodist dead!" [FWP: *Our Uncle Duncan Pigue was a Methodist minister and known throughout Kentucky, Tennessee and Mississippi as a great orator. He would travel to churches throughout the region debating ministers of other faiths about the "rightness" of Methodism. He wrote a book called Ten Reasons Why I'm Not A Campbellite. Alexander Campbell was the founder of the Disciples of Christ Church, commonly called the Church of Christ or the Christian Church in many towns. Where there is more than one, some other name--usually the street--is substituted for "First." Incidentally, "Duncan" was his nickname; his real name was Richard Hugh for his two grandfathers Richard Pigg and Hugh Moss. The family story is that when Duncan went to college, a professor told him the name Pigg was a French name and should be spelled Pigue. He came home and told his family, and they all changed the spelling. Even aunts, uncles and cousins in Tennessee changed their spelling of the surname, but they still pronounced it "Pig."*]

In World War II I was sent to the Philippines to take part in the planned invasion of Japan. My overseas orders changed the spelling of my name from Pigue to Pique. When I tried to get it corrected, I was told, "That will have to wait until you get back stateside." They didn't know that I would return. When the war ended and I reported to Fort Knox to revert to inactive reserve duty, I again asked for the correction and was told, "You are scheduled to be released tomorrow; however, if you want the records changed, you'll have to stay here for several weeks to make the change. I left the next day, and for the next forty-eight years have spelled it *Pique*. [FWP: *Several other members of the family have changed their name to Pique and pronounce it "Pick," "Peek" or "Pagay." Even brothers spell and pronounce it differently.*]

My father rode horseback in the winter to contract with farmers for the purchase of their tobacco crops by Lewis Tobacco Company in Fulton. He had two horses in our stable for use on alternate rides. He would ride out one day, sleep in a barn and ride back the next day, when I would take the horse about a mile to Zelia Murchison's farm to pasture. One day I was riding in a thunderstorm and bent forward on the horse's neck to keep the rain out of my face when lightning struck the horse's head and killed it. I was knocked unconscious and had to be taken to Dr. Johnson, who lived across the street from us. If I had been sitting up, the lightning would probably have hit me.

Alben Barkley was a Graves County lawyer who "politicked" in Water Valley. My father's niece Iva Thompson caught his eye, and he began "courtin'" her, but she said she thought at the time he was "just a big bag of wind." She later married Dr. Robert L. Ringo, and Barkley went on to be Truman's Vice President, called "The Veep." [FWP: *My Grandfather Thompson remembered that it was in the Thompsons' backyard that Barkley made his first political speech.*]

Uncle Jimmy Williams, husband of my father's sister, Nannie Pigue, was a very impressive man. When someone brought him something to repair, he never backed down. When asked what was wrong, he would say, "It's big at the little and bottom at the top." When asked what caused it, he would reply, "The square ball jumped off the pivot and the Genei (Geneege) failed to fizz." His highest praise was "Well, that looks like it was done on purpose." I've carried that one thought of his throughout my engineering career.

Uncle George Yates, as he was known by everyone, had a wife named Kansas Nebraska, who was called "Aunt Kans." She had an electric razor which consisted of an ordinary safety razor with a solenoid device which agitated the blade easily and very effectively, but it didn't catch on, so he didn't stock any more in his store.

John Henry Yates was an interesting town character. One day he went into the barber shop and said, "Give me a haircut." The barber did and then said, "You want it washed out?" J.H. answered, "Yes." Then the barber said, "How about a shave, a tonic and a facial massage?" When J.H. nodded, the barber proceeded. When it was all done, J.H. laid a quarter on the shelf. The barber said, "John Henry, I can't give you a haircut, shampoo, tonic, shave, massage, all for a quarter!" J.H. replied, "You just did!"

Ab Pirtle was another fascinating character. When someone would invite him to have a coke, he would say, "Well and now, seeing's how, be it an accommodation to you, don't care if I do." He would purposely kill the King's English just to be entertaining. One day Roy Latta asked him whether he had been to the Fulton County Fair. Ab said no, he didn't have a ride. Roy said, "Well, I go every morning. You could have ridden with me." Ab replied, "Well, if I'd a knowed I coulda rode, I shore woulda went!"

Clothes were washed in a big "wash pot" in the back yard whether the houses were in town or out in the rural areas. A fire was built under the pot from scrapwood. The laundress stirred the clothes in boiling water with a wooden spade. Soap was made from ashes and hog fat at butchering time. Clothes were hung to dry on wire lines in the back yard with wooden clothes pins, too. [FWP: *A black lady by the name of "Bobbie" would come and wash clothes for my grandmother. A lot of people thought her name was "Judy" because her husband's name was "Punch," and they remembered the Punch and Judy puppet shows. Bobbie was a wonderful lady, and I looked forward to the days when she would come and bring her children for me to play with. I always envied them because they didn't have to wear shoes outside, and I did!*]

When I was a child in Water Valley, it was common to hear the expression "Come over and 'hope' me do the job." I thought they were saying "hope," but I found out in College English that Chaucer, writing in Old English used "holpe" instead of "help." Also the expression "sit a spell" came from the Old English "spelle," meaning "a period of time." [FWP: *Most of the people in lower Western Kentucky came from Middle Tennessee, and before that from North Carolina and Virginia and were of English and Scotch-Irish extraction.*]

Telephone service was provided by Effie Laird in her home just north of the Methodist parsonage. Farmers ran their own phone lines into her switchboard. These "party lines" might have ten or fifteen "parties" on one line. Each had a different signal to call a person to the phone. One signal might be two short rings and one long; another might be two shorts and three longs. Much pre-radio entertainment was provided by listening in on others' calls. When I obtained my electrician's card in 1927, my first

service call was to repair Dr. Kirby's phone about two miles north of town. I opened up the box on the wall, checked the dry cells, checked the wire connections inside and out and could find nothing wrong. So I closed it back up and said, "Now, you try it!" He did, and it worked! He told everyone, "He really knows his stuff. He didn't even have to try it himself." I still don't know what was wrong with it.

The rural phones in Water Valley were wall-mounted with a receiver on a hook. To use the phone, a crank was turned to "ring" the "Central." When the conversation was over, the "receiver" went back "on the hook." The Southwestern Bell phones were desk type. When the phone was lifted, the operator would say, "Number, Please?" The number would be no more than three digits somewhere between one and 999.

After I graduated from the University and was working for General Electric in Evansville, Indiana, I saw my first dial phone. To use it, I dialed the number and then picked up the receiver. The local manager said, "It'll work better if you dial after you pick it up." What's that old story about taking the boy out of the country?

When my father died in 1935, I was working as a Commercial Service Engineer for Kentucky Utilities Company in Paducah, traveling Western Kentucky. I paid mileage rates and had a Southwestern Bell phone from Fulton installed in my mother's home in Water Valley, so she could talk to my



**Water Valley Grade School - 1924:** First row: Ozelle Armstrong, Zettie Weatherspoon, Elizabeth Martin, Polly Mullins, Bonnie Mae Jones, Onez McAlister, Mary Pentecost, Dicie Gilbert, Cadrie Owen, Blondelle Wooten, Stella Marie Roper. Second row: Rachel Pinkleton, Margaret Duke, Monette Cox, Marie Gardner, Rachel Elledge, Ruth Martin, Corene Weatherspoon. Third row: Herman Weatherspoon, Ralph Boyd, Owen Colley, Jack Wooten, Robert Hindman, Millard Cloyes, Harold Bomar. Fourth row: Georgia Dell Williams, unknown, Jonah Bennett, Wilford Hatchell, Curtiss Owens, Zelmer Pigue. Top row: Ray Owens, Joe Holland, Tommie McCuan, Travis Dacus, Edd Gardner, Miss Myrtle Brann, teacher, J. C. McAllister, Marvin Cloyes, Glen Hindman, Deward Wilson, unknown, Claud Owens, Camell Stephens Buren Yates.

brother Bertes and his family in Fulton. Twelve years later, when I worked for Westinghouse in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, I visited my mother in Water Valley. I told my secretary that my mail address would be Water Valley, but my phone would be a Fulton number. She was a city woman not acquainted with rural telephone systems. She tried to reach me by calling the Water Valley Central. Effie said, "You'll have to call him in Fulton, but you had better wait half an hour. I just saw him go by to pick up his mail." The Pittsburgh office got quite a kick out of that.

There was a Southwest Bell phone in Weaks' Drug Store. When a call came in for someone in town, a runner would notify him or her to come to the phone. One day, Ralph Boyd's older brother Raymond called him to wish him "Happy Birthday." Ten-year-old Ralph had never talked on a phone before, but he wrote his brother regularly. He picked up the phone and said, "Dear Bub."

Everyone other than the Methodist and Presbyterian churches and the high school used coal oil lamps, except for Dr. Bard and Zelia Murchison. Each had a Delco Electric System consisting of a large bank of batteries charged by a gasoline engine generator. Every morning they would recharge the batteries from their previous night's discharge. Dr. Bard eventually replaced the direct-current system with alternating-current that had enough capacity to take care of many of his neighbors. That's when I decided I wanted to become an electrician. I completed the year-long correspondence course from L.L. Coure School of Electricity in Chicago and got a diploma in 1927 declaring me "First-Class Electrician." I was fifteen years old. I worked for Dr. Bard installing wiring and lights for his system into many Water Valley homes. Later Kentucky-Tennessee Light and Power took over and made electricity available for everyone. Years later when TVA came into being, KTL & P was replaced by Jackson Purchase REA Cooperative, created from Franklin Roosevelt's REA (Rural Electrification Administration). Electricity was priced at twelve and one-half cents a kilowatt with a minimum per month of \$1.25. I remember hearing someone ask my mother, "Miz Pearl, have you done your ironing this week?" Her reply was, "No, I've already used my minimum. I'll wait till they read the meter this week."

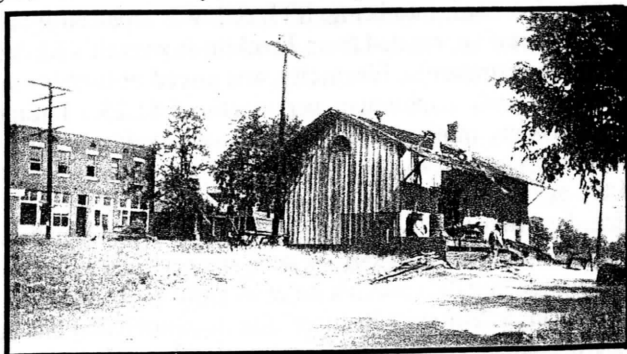
One time, just after the "Light and Power" built a distribution system and supplied all the houses with electric meters, the new Methodist minister bragged that he was saving the church a lot of money. He had bought from a "traveling salesman" a "Kilowatt Reducer" for the church and one for the parsonage. He did not realize that they were illegal jumpers around the meters to steal current from the utility company. He was not prosecuted.

When Ed Aker was mayor, he signed a contract with K.L. & P. to supply street lighting, which was much appreciated by the citizens. However, some "Peck's Bad Boys" used the new street lights for target

practice for their flippers and BB guns. Flippers were called sling-shots by some, but a true sling-shot was patterned after the one David used to slay Goliath. It had two slings, two feet each in width, with a leather two-inch square holder in between the slings. A flipper had a handle (a "Y" fork from a tree limb, a similar shape cut from a wooden board on a piece of one-inch iron rod) with two strips of inner tube rubber about six inches long with a two-inch leather square holder in between.

The first business that the road entering from the south passed was a garage on the left, next, across a side street was the lumber yard, opposite the present post office. After the road turned to the right, just behind the stores was Butcher Cloy's Barber and Shoe Repair Shop. A haircut was twenty-five cents, a shave was ten cents, half soles were fifty cents and heels were twenty-five cents. The introduction of Panco soles, which could be cemented on by the shoe owner, greatly reduced Cloy's business. Next was Burley Brown's Grocery Store, where cheese was cut off a circular slab for 5 cents a slice; crackers were in a barrel and free with the cheese. I ran a rabbit trap line with thirty box traps on a three-mile route. Burley Brown bought my rabbits for ten cents each. My 7 1/2-E brogans were bought here. (Years later when I went on active duty in the U.S. Army, I learned my correct shoe size was 9B.)

The road through Water Valley entered from the south in front of Ben Bennett's home, where the present Highway 45 enters, but at that time, the road led from the Evangelical Church to the west and then turned north along the present route. It followed 45 to the center of town and then turned east, passing between two business buildings, turning left and then right across the railroad tracks, then left to the end of the settlement and finally right, into the country toward Camp Beauregard.



**Tearing down Water Valley, Kentucky Railroad Station, Sept. 1942**

When the Confederate Monument arrived by train it was unloaded on the side track onto a wooden skid. It was so heavy it could not be pulled



by a ten-horse team. So, a device was rigged: a mule walked around in circles turning a winch which, when tied to a tree in front, allowed the monument to inch along. It took several weeks to move the monument to its present location in the Camp Beauregard Cemetery.

When US 45 was built, it was first a dirt road, then graveled, then concreted. Wash Seay had the contract to move the sidewalk back to make room for the wider road. I worked for him for ten cents an hour digging up and moving the sidewalk back. The right-of-way took most of Uncle Jimmy Williams' front yard with the road almost touching his front porch. The new shorter, straighter road reduced the distance from Water Valley to Fulton from seven to five miles and reduced the time from one-half hour to ten minutes.

When construction of the highway was finished, the Greyhound Bus Line started service through Water Valley. At first we had one bus each day in each direction. Later this service was increased to several a day. In addition, Neale's Trucking Service ran a truck each morning to Fulton and back in the afternoon. In fact, for years different people provided truck service to and from Fulton, bringing in freight and ice. Most people had coolers either in their cisterns or wells or in holes under their houses where tow sacks provided evaporative cooling when kept wet with water. When ice became available, many people installed ice boxes years before electric refrigerators became available. A favorite dessert in season was snow cream made from snow, vanilla extract and sugar. I still remember that marvelous taste.

Nearly everyone back then raised a vegetable garden, kept a cow for milk, chickens for meat and eggs, pigs and cows for meat and horses for transportation. Most lots contained a pond for water and a barn for horses, cows and feed. Along the fronts of stores and the backs of churches were hitching racks. A big water trough was maintained on each side of the railroad in the business area.

We always kept a cow. Every morning I took her about a mile and a half out to the pasture and then brought her back at night. She was milked morning and night. She would not allow anyone to milk her on the left side, and a person never dared try to go through the barn door alongside her. When she started through, she wouldn't stop. If someone were in the way, he got crushed. We had a rat terrier dog named Babe. (My father was a Yankees fan.) Babe would sit patiently beside anyone milking our cow. He was expecting a stream of milk occasionally to be aimed directly at his mouth.

My mother always had chickens, white leghorns for eggs and Black Orphingtons for meat. After my father died, she lived alone except when I came home on the weekends. Many times when I would take her to Fulton to visit my brother Bertes and his family--wife Ramelle and children

Charles, Gene, Carmen, Joe and Jere--she would say, "We had better go. I need to get back and put up the chickens." At dark the chickens would go into the henhouse and sit on the roosting poles, about four feet off the ground. They would not go to sleep until the door was closed. I thought she was being a slave to the chickens, so I said, "I want you to keep track of your expenses for chicken feed and your income from selling the eggs and chickens to see if it's worth your time to be taking care of them." At the end of a year, expenses equaled the income. She protested, "But I had the use of the chickens all year." She continued keeping the chickens, I noticed.

My cousin Will Pigue was the richest man in our family. He earned big money as the Publishing Editor of the Gulf Oil Company in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He was everyone's favorite cousin. When he came to visit, beef steak was ordered from Fulton, beaten with a hammer to tenderize it, then fried well done with biscuits and gravy. Will confessed to me that he had steak at home all the time, and he coveted those Rhode Island frying chickens he could see through the screen door.

Years later, when I married and took my bride to meet my mother, we arrived at night. The next morning Mother apologized for not having any fried squirrel for me because my nephew Joe was sick and couldn't go hunting. She said, "But I have your second choice, fried chicken." My wife had had a pet chicken as a child and would not eat chicken, so she said, "Oh, I don't eat chicken." Mother said, "Well, what do you eat for breakfast?" Connie said, "A piece of fruit and some cereal and milk." Mother said, "You mean you eat supper in the morning?" Our habit in Water Valley was to eat a full meal in the morning, a full meal at noon and then a glass of cereal at night. Later that day we had catfish and hush puppies for lunch at my cousin Hugh Pigue's house and barbecued goat for dinner at my brother's. My wife could not stomach any of it. She later told her mother in Kansas City, "You have no idea what those Kentuckians eat!"

We had breakfast early, dinner at noon and supper at night. Any kind of game meat was welcome, but my favorite was fried squirrel. By today's standards, my diet was terrible: meat was fried in lard, everything was salted and all drinks were full of sugar. Dessert was served at all three meals.

The mother of a sixteen-year-old single girl said to her daughter, "You invite John Henry over for Sunday supper. I'll cook it, but you make him think you did it, and he'll ask you to marry him." When he ate everything in sight, the mother said, "John Henry, what do you think of the supper Mary fixed for you?" He replied, "Oh, it was pretty good, what there was of it." Then he realized that didn't sound right, so he said, "Oh, there was plenty of it, such as it was." They did not get married.

Every farm had one or more “stiles,” a set of steps on each side of a fence used instead of a gate to get to the other side of the fence. One cow and one sheep in each flock wore a bell to tell the farmer where to find them: hence the expression “bell cow,” meaning the one who furnished necessary information (or later, the trend of things).

Farmers would kill hogs or cows and dress them to be sold door-to-door to order. They would cut off whatever you wanted and weigh it on a pair of hanging scales. Many people in Water Valley did their own butchering. My father did and ground his own sausage. My favorite taste, enduring till today, is those fried strips of pork tenderloin which we ground into sausage.



**The above photo of Water Valley students was taken at the school in 1908 and is owned by Hershel Bennett.**

First row: (l to r) Bertes Pigue, unknown, Elsie Neely, unknown, unknown, Boyd Aydcott, Herschel Pigue. Second row: (l to r) Earl Gossum Weaks, Daniel Murchison, unknown, unknown, Ruth Pirtle Weaks, Herschel Bennett, Edward Hall, Fred Stokes, unknown, unknown. Third row: (l to r) Perce Barnes, Harry Weaks, unknown, Hugh Pigue, next three unidentified, Cantrill Witt, Neely, Lonnie Cowell, Wall Dacus. Fourth row: first three unknown, Gordon Stokes, next two unknown, Stella Adelotte, unknown, Effie Cowell, Gilson Latta. Fifth row: Bessie Walker Owens, unknown, Viola Dacus Kitts, Next three unknown, Catherine Witt, Mike Williams, Neva Gossum, Roy Latta.

On Saturday many farmers would bring in wagonloads of watermelons and “mushmelons” and peddle them for five, ten and fifteen cents. They would “plug” any melon for you to taste before buying. My father would bargain to buy a wagon-load, then store them under the beds

to eat later. Farmers with melon patches were plagued by boys stealing melons at night. Sometimes they would inject Ipecac into marked melons. These produced diarrhea, effectively stopping the thefts! [FWP: *My favorite memory of watermelons is on hot summer days my grandfather would put a melon down in the well and haul it up in the windless bucket about 5:00 P.M. It really got cold in that well, and one from the refrigerator has never tasted so good.*]

At night in the summer various clubs put on icecream suppers in the area in front of the stores. Hand-cranked icecream in various flavors was sold by the dish or in cones to raise money. I believe that icecream was the coldest substance I ever encountered. I can remember the tears coming to my eyes from swallowing it too fast.

Aunt Nannie Willams baked the best popovers and sweet potatoes. She would never tell her secret, but Uncle Jimmy said he had taught her how to bake these.

Unusual events in Water Valley would have to include the wreck of "Whiskey Dick" and a freight train that left the siding too soon. Several passengers, including my father, were laid up all winter by their injuries. Another accident involved a black teenager. He was riding on a saddled mule when a thresher blew its whistle. The mule ran away down the hill. As it turned the corner by the bank, the rider slipped out of the saddle, caught his foot in the stirrup and was dragged to death on the roadway.

Then there was the Pirtle-Crass feud. A battle in the road cost one man his eye. Other violence included Charlie \_\_\_\_\_'s killing his wife and her sister at the old Marshall Barnes home at the top of the hill near the high school. The school dismissed classes for the rest of the day.

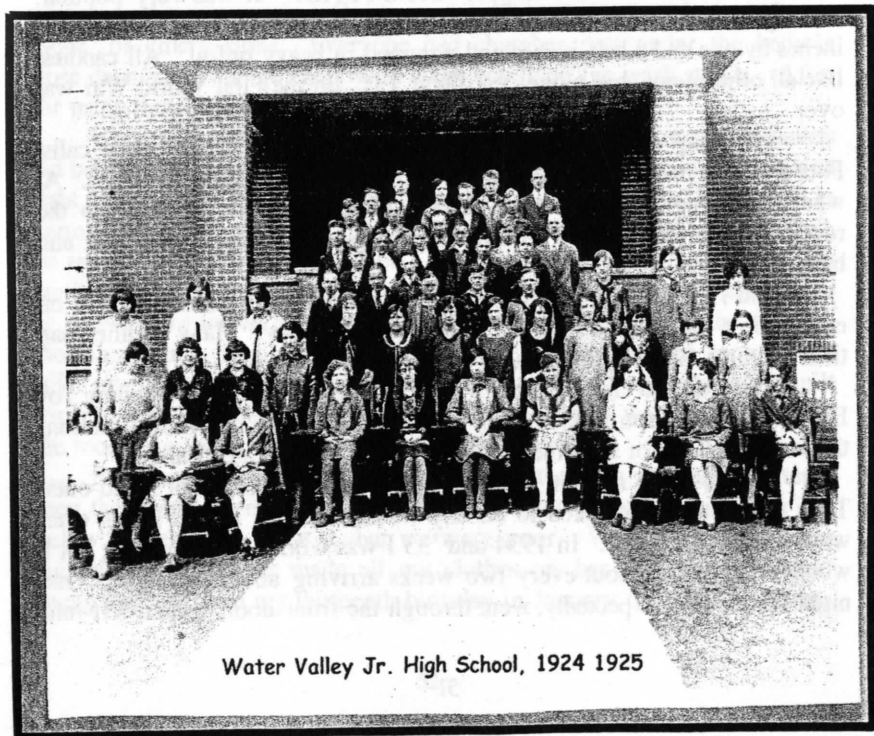
Another newsworthy event was Thompson's Flour Mill burning one night. Wayne Thompson invented "self-rising" flour and made and sold it in bags with the photo of his daughter Rosemary on the front. He wife, Dora (called "Sookie") was my father's sister. He operated a saw-mill behind the flour mill, sawing trees into rough lumber. One day he slipped and cut off a foot. Later that week he had a funeral and burial for his foot. The grave stone said, "Here lies the foot of Wayne Thompson. Born (date) and Died (date)." Several years later he was conducting a safety demonstration and cut off the same leg higher up. He buried the leg part with his foot. He was fitted with a cork leg and walked without a cane. He would sit on a keg in front of the mill and receive salesmen who were trying to sell him stocks of sacks and other supplies. As he talked, he would keep pulling the sock up his cork leg, which looked like a natural leg. After pulling the sock up several times, he could startle a "city-slicker" when he suddenly drove a tack into what appeared to be his leg, which of course was of cork construction.

Zelmer W. Pique  
 Junior W. V. High School  
 1925 - 1926

Zel Pique	H H Mills Prin	Eugenia Mills teacher	Marvin "Fatty" Clayton	Selden Reed Clayton		
Jarnes stewart		Harley Newton				
Joe Mac Reed	Curtis Dawson	Robert Hindman	Trey Duke	George Dawson Yates	Roy Owen	
owen colley	Randle Laird		Wilford Hatchel	Ralph Boyd		
Finis Lee Cannon	claude "shorty" Owen	Harold Bomar	Jack Wooten	Earl Holland	Opal Rickman	Roberta Jackson Helen Craff

Mary Virginia Scott	Sara Hatchel	Blondelle Wooten	Ruby Evelyn Cannon	Adams	Bonnie Mac Jones	Dorothy Stephens
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Marie Newton	Maudie Celia Cannon	Stella Marie Koper	Ruby McNeill	Nelle Weeks	Gossum	Nova McNeill	Sara Olive Roemer	Lucile Craff	Hopkins
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Water Valley Jr. High School, 1924 1925

In 1921 Geraldine Latta and a friend were in a school play. They left her home in a Model-T. When they crossed Latta's Crossing about one mile south of town, they were hit by a speeding freight train. The friend landed in some thick bushes, unhurt except for bruises and scratches, but the car was demolished. When the train finally stopped in Water Valley, Geraldine was found thrown over the cow-catcher on the front of the engine unconscious, but with no serious injuries. They were patched up and were able a few days later to fill their parts acting in the play. One of her lines was "Wow, that really cracks me up!" It brought down the house.

In the post World War I period, it cost two cents to mail a letter and one cent for a postcard. During the War, War Savings Bonds and War Savings Stamps were sold in denominations of five, ten, twenty-five, fifty cents and one, five and ten dollars. The stamps were pasted into a book. When the book filled up to \$25.00, it could be exchanged for a War Savings Bond. In the post-war depression period many people were cashing in their bonds.

Candy bars included five-cent Hershey bars in sweet chocolate and almond bars. There were larger bars for ten cents. All came wrapped in heavy tinfoil. There was the coconut candy "Mounds" bar and a big squishy "Moon Pie Sandwich." The candy drummer told Gene Tarpley that one company had brought out a new candy bar, but the boss still hadn't decided what the bar should be named. He replied, "Damn if I know." So the bar came out with the wrapper 'DAM-FI-NO!' It was very popular. All-day suckers were other treats. Eskimo Pies then were about three inches by one and a half inches and wrapped in heavy tinfoil. All candies, like all other items, had a one-cent "War Tax" till the First World War was over.

Traveling scissors sharpeners and pan-menders made yearly calls. Pots and pans had their holes plugged by little rivets through the holes. At wheat threshing time, the steam-driven tractor-thresher would make the rounds of the wheat crops with a crew bringing in barrels of wheat and bales of straw.

The Liberty Bell was on a national tour in the 'twenties. It was on exhibit on a flatcar on a siding in Water Valley all day. Many families had their pictures taken by this famous national treasure.

Every day at noon people would set their watches by listening for Browder Mill's noon whistle from Fulton. Depending on wind direction, they had to allow for the time for the sound to reach Water Valley.

Hoboes made regular visits each year to backdoors for hand-outs. They were insulted if asked to do any work. No one locked doors even when away from home. In 1934 and '35 I was working in Paducah, but I would come home about every two weeks arriving about midnight. One night I came in unexpectedly, went through the front door, turned left into

my corner room without turning on the light and got into bed. Immediately, there was loud screaming and flailing about. My cousin, Melba Thompson, and a friend had come down from Paducah to visit my mother, who had them sleep in my bed. It took a while to restore tranquility.

Another "Big Event" was the annual dredging of the creek. A big dredge boat was shipped in by rail and assembled south of town damming the creek to provide flotation. Dirt was dredged up and deposited on the creek banks. The total project went several miles north on past Mobley's Camp Ground, draining several swamps and preventing the annual floods. Near the Camp Ground was an artesian well where good cold water bubbled up out of the ground. That was the only artesian well we had ever seen. Bayou De Chien creek was pronounced "Bidey Shay." It was French for Dog Creek.

Pa, Aunt Nannie, Aunt Ada and Uncle Jimmy would take me with them when they went fishing at the "Bottoms," backwaters from the Mississippi River near Hickman. We'd leave at dawn in a wagon pulled by two mules, ride all day and make camp by dark. Those fried catfish and fried biscuits tasted like heaven-sent manna should have. Paul Bennett would go with us at times. Paul had a speech impediment when he was a boy. I remember once Pa said to him, "Paul, go home and get ready and we'll take you fishing." Paul replied, "I'm all weddy weddy!"

Men used straight razors to shave, after sharpening these a few strokes on the razor strap. Once a month the razors were sharpened on a "hone" or emery stone. Everyone had chamber pots under the beds in those days and water pitchers with wash bowls on the wash stands. After our using these, they were emptied out the back door.

Chores included bringing in the coal every night, using coal buckets and taking out the ashes each morning. In winter sad-irons were heated at night in front of the grate, then wrapped in flannel and placed in the bed to warm it. It was very comforting to get between the cold sheets and push the irons down to warm our feet. [FWP: *My grandmother would put another feather mattress over my cousin and me. We couldn't move, but we surely were warm at night.*] Covers were quilts made by the women, often in quilting bees. I have passed on to my children ten each of the quilts my mother made. Included in each set is a "wedding-ring" quilt worth several hundred dollars today. Alarm clocks were not required. The roosters would crow at the first crack of dawn.

Boys wore short pants and long black stockings until age thirteen, when they were given a Barlow knife and long pants. I still have my Barlow. We didn't know it, but we were poor. Very little money was available. My mother made all my clothes on her foot-treadle Singer sewing machine. On my thirteenth birthday in January of 1925, my father

brought home my first “store-bought” clothes. Included was a long pants suit. When I put it on, I exclaimed, “Boy! There must be forty pockets.” Thereafter, everyone except my mother called me “Forty Pockets.” Eventually, “Pockets” was dropped, but even today my name in Water Valley is “Forty.”

In the summer boys wore “BVDs,” one-piece underwear of advanced design. It had no buttons because of cross-over shoulders. In the winter everyone wore long underwear called “Long-Johns.” A bath was taken each Saturday, as the saying went, “whether it was needed or not.” Some of the country boys said they were sewed into their Long-Johns at the first freeze and didn’t take them off till the spring thaw. I liked the BVDs better than any other underwear before or since. After I reverted to inactive duty in the Army in 1946 following WW II, I wrote the BVD company to learn where I could buy them, but was told they were no long made. What a waste!



**Water Valley, Kentucky High School, 1924**

Seated (l to r) Helen Richmond, Alma Seay, Ozelle Armstrong, Audria Pique, Monette Cox, Novella Taylor, Blondelle Wooten, Mary Pentecost, Irene Williams. First row, standing: Soncie Reed, Louise Lantrip, Bonnie Mae Jones, Obara Swannn, Eugenia Roemer Mills (teacher), Hubert H. Mills (principal), Daisy Weems, Maxine Williams. Second row, standing: Ralph Boyd, Zee W. Pique (a freshman in 1924), Virgil Arnett, Raymond Colley, Nathan Gossum, Marie Newton, Lucile Croft. Top row, standing: Carl Pirtle, Seldon Reed, Chap Taylor, Bill Bomar, Wilford Hatchel, Roy Owen, Mobley Jackson, Marvin Cloys.



The Water Valley merchants would put on a sales campaign to attract outsiders to do business. A customer would get a "drawing ticket" for every dollar he spent. Then on Saturday at 3:00 P.M. tickets would be drawn from the ticket barrel. "First" ticket holder got five dollars, "second" received fifteen dollars and "third" got twenty-five dollars. On Christmas Eve the "third" ticket holder got a new Model T Ford. These drawings created a large crowd every Saturday at 3:00 P.M. When my cousin Oliver Pigue went to Detroit for the first time, he was on Woodard Avenue when the shops let out at 5:00 P.M. and the people were crowding the streets. He said, "Wow! They must be holding a drawing somewhere!"

In 1919 my father Judge Pigue bought a new Model-T Ford for \$275.00. It had to be hand-cranked to start. They offered an option of an electric starter for nineteen dollars, but he said, "Why pay extra when it cranks so easily." The Model-T Ford did not have a gear shift as other makes did. It had three pedals on the floor. The left pedal put the car into neutral when it was pushed half-way down and into low gear when it was pushed all the way. With the left pedal half way in and the middle pedal all the way down, the car was in reverse. When all pedals were released, the car was in high gear. The right pedal was the brake. The accelerator was a hand lever on the right side of the steering wheel. The "spark" control was a similar lever on the left side. The ignition key was a knob on the dash, which when turned to the left operated the battery. When the engine started, this knob was shifted to the right so electric current could be supplied by the magneto. When a person was cranking the car, he kept his thumb beside the index finger. Allowing the thumb to follow the crank handle often resulted in a broken thumb if the engine backfired.

In the wintertime many roads would become impassable when the rains came. Many Model-T's would then be jacked up for the winter to save their tires. In cold weather the right rear wheel was jacked up and hot water poured over the intake manifold. Sometimes, when the engine started, the car would trip over the jack and run back against the garage, pinning the cranker.

A new invention was the "demountable rim" for our tires with inner tubes introduced for use inside these casings. Before that, tires were solid or air-filled like bicycle tires. All cars had repair kits for the operator's "vulcanizing" his inner tubes.

In 1919 Marshall Barnes, the richest man in town, bought a new Model-T Ford. As usual, it was shipped in a freight car. When it was unloaded, Mr. Barnes took it to the blacksmith shop to have the front wheels lined up "straight-up-and-down." He didn't know that they were supposed to tilt in. He thought they had been damaged in shipment. When he found out better, he refused to have them changed back. [FWP: Mr.

*Barnes also had my grandfather, the blacksmith, remove the front fenders so he could see the tires moving and "tell where he was going."]*

In 1928-32 while I attended the University of Kentucky in Lexington, I rode a 1929 Harley Davidson JD-78 Police Special Motorcycle to deliver newspapers and to travel to and from Water Valley. One time when the highway was graveled and Boone Bennett was mayor, he asked if I would take him for his first motorcycle ride, but not faster than forty miles an hour. When I shifted into high gear, we were going sixty miles an hour. He said, "Well, you can go a little faster." I speeded up to ninety. He said, "O.K., you can go on up to sixty miles per hour." I showed him the speedometer reading of ninety-five. He grabbed me with both arms and legs and said, "Let me off this thing!" That was his last bike ride.

Wayne Cooke courted Stella Aydelotte for fifty years, first with a horse and buggy and later in a Model-T Ford. Every Sunday he would ride thirty miles to see her. They never married.

Another consistent Water Valley visitor was my cousin Mike Williams. He came to his parents' home every Sunday some forty-three miles from Paducah. After he married Mary Bell, he continued to come every other Sunday, bringing "the prettiest and smartest grandchild, Frances" (according to his mother, my Aunt Nannie). [FWP: *And I haven't changed a bit! Being the only child of their only child made me seem about perfect to some in the family. My grandfather Jimmy Williams told my mother that I would never live to be grown because I was too perfect. Well, I'm now sixty-six in 1994, so you can see I wasn't as perfect as my grandparents thought I was. They would let me do anything I wanted, including eating fried baloney sandwiches and bananas sliced lengthwise with peanut butter between them, and then the whole banana rolled in sugar. Hey, don't knock it till you try it! I still eat both. Well, I leave the sugar off because of my weight, but good is good! My grandmother also made the best pimento cheese for sandwiches I have ever tasted. They always had a bottle of blackberry wine on the table to pour in the iced tea instead of lemon juice.*]

Mike Williams was a doughboy in World War I in France. When he first arrived in France, he was greeted by Frenchmen saying, "Mon Ami!" He replied, "Yeah, Bon Ami, wash windows with it." [FWP: *Also in answer to the French "tre bien, Monsieur?" Mike would reply, "Three beans in a messkit!" Learning French was not a priority with him, but having a lot of fun was. He was in France a year, six months before the Armistice and six months after. To hear him tell it, it was just a big picnic. He had more funny stories about life in the Army and even after the many, many times I had heard them, they were just as funny as the first time I heard them. He was a great storyteller. Most people back then were. It's a wonderful ability that seems to be lost in a world of TV, movies and the*

*media. Most people were great pranksters back then. Their great entertainment was to pull a "practical" joke on someone, get a great laugh out of the victim's discomfort and then tell the stories the rest of their lives.] Mike brought me back a German bugle he took off a dead German soldier on the battlefield.*

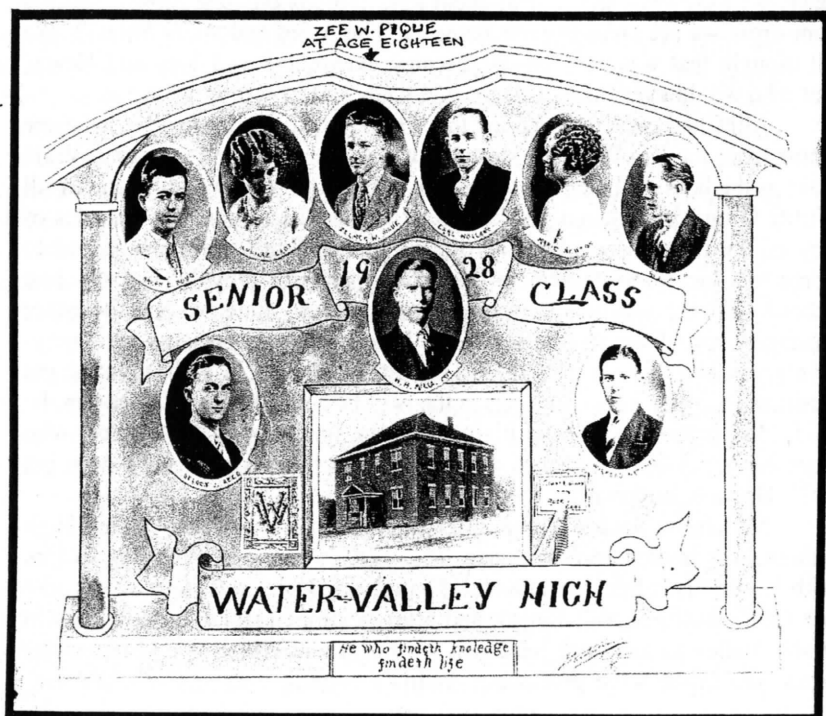
In 1921 Mike installed the first radio in Water Valley at his parents' house. It was a little box about the size of a chalk box, four by four by six inches connected to a pair of headphones, to A, B and C batteries and an outside antenna between two fifty-foot poles set 100 feet apart. Uncle Jimmy did not like to listen, but Aunt Nannie loved the radio. [FWP: *She loved "soap operas" of the day and wrote fan letters to the stars. They would send her signed photographs. I sure wish I had kept them, they would probably be worth a lot today. She also loved to send for things through the mail. She called them her "Senfers," and to this day, my family calls catalogs "Senfer books." She kept a box of the samples she ordered, mostly of cosmetics, for me to play with when I visited.*] Later, Mike exchanged this wireless for a larger one with three headphones. I liked to listen to it. Our favorite program came on when the announcer said at 10:10 P.M., "Ten: Ten, WGN, Sam and Henry!" followed by a fifteen minute dialog between Sam and Henry. One night about a year later, we were very sad to hear them say, "This is our last show. Starting tomorrow we are changing our name to "The Amos and Andy Show." We all thought that was very unwise because everyone loved Sam and Henry, but who would ever hear of Amos and Andy? How wrong we were.

Mike had gone to work for the "Gas Plant" in Paducah when he came home from the Big War. He started out shoveling coal and wound up years later as the boss of the entire operation. The plant was owned by the Insull Utility Group in Chicago. Mike's plant had the best operating statistics of any of the forty-three plants across the United States. He was asked to come to Chicago to explain to the other managers why he had the best record. At the meeting he was the last speaker. One by one the other managers would get up and say, "I've been in the gas business for thirty-five years, and this is what I do." The next would say, "I've been in the gas business for forty years, and this is the way I do it." When Mike got up, he said, "My pappy always said it's not the one that gets up the earliest who does the best job; it's the one who is the widest awake when he does get up!" He brought down the house.

My cousin Audria Pigue, after graduation from Water Valley High School, was invited to our cousin Will Pigue's home in Pittsburg to live with his family while she attended Draughn's Business College. She met her future husband, Bill Regan, and after getting engaged, brought him to Water Valley to meet her relatives. Aunt Nannie Williams and her sister Aunt Ada Pigue were discussing Audria's coming visit. Aunt Ada said,

"Did you know that Audria is marrying a Catholic?" Aunt Nannie replied, "Well, if she's marrying him, he is probably all right in spite of that." He was the first Catholic I had ever seen. They were married over sixty years, and he is still living in Massachusetts at age ninety-one.

Audria's brother "Nuts" Pigue was quite a prankster. One Halloween he dressed up in one of his mother's dresses and bonnets, put flour on his face and ran through the black church across the tracks behind the stores and hid in Uncle George Yates' barn. Arguments went on for years about the "ghost" that had appeared in the church. [FWP: He was also the one along with my Dad, Mike Williams, who got a boat whistle in Paducah, brought it to Water Valley and hooked it up to their Uncle's flour mill and blew it about 3:00 A.M. one morning. The people reacted about the way many in the United States did to Orson Welles' "War of the Worlds." Drunkards threw away their bottles and swore off drink forever, many thought the Mississippi River had changed its course and was flowing through Water Valley, and other equally wild tales sprang up. Mike and "Nuts" created quite a sensation and a great story to tell for years to come. The boys never admitted they pulled off this stand-in for the angel Gabriel.]



Water Valley High School was dedicated in 1914; I am pictured in the postcard photo of the ceremony. It was a two-story square building located one block south of our house. Most of the students rode horseback or in buggies to school. At the back of the school lot there was a pond to water the horses and a stable to house them. I don't recall ever seeing a car parked at the school. On each side of the stable there were two privies: one for girls and one for boys. Outside the school's back door was a hand pump to supply drinking water.

No electricity was available so a gas lighting system similar to the ones in the three churches brought light to the school. One central gas generator had to be filled with one gallon of gasoline, then hand pumped to generate the gas, which flowed through pipes to the lights. On each burner was an asbestos bag about the size of a package of cigarettes. A flint strike on the end of a long pole that reached the light provided the spark to ignite the gas. When first lit the light was dim, but gradually increased in brightness after a minute or two.

One entered the building on the east side into a hallway with a cloak room on each side at the front and a double stairway going up on the right. Under the stairs were two cloak rooms and the stairs down to the basement, containing the steam furnace and the coal bin. Steam radiators were in each room. The boys were assigned days to come early and fire up the boilers, and others added coal through the day. Girls were assigned sweeping, mopping, window washing and blackboard cleaning. Years later a janitor was hired. The radiators hissed and knocked during cold weather. Sometimes the steam pressure was so high that the escape valves at the end of each radiator spewed steam into the room.

The first room on the left housed the first, second and third grades. Each desk had a folding seat in front and hinged lid over a storage space for books and the ever-present slate, which preceded paper tablets. In the far right corner of the desktop was an ink-well, which too often was the receptacle in which to dip the curls of the girl in front.

One person taught all three grades. Two classes studied while one class was reciting. Tall students usually were seated in the back. Grades were seated front to back, right to left. Students stayed in their seats for classes and study. One hand was raised for permission to speak and two hands, to go to the privy. A water dispenser stood on its table in the corner.

The first room on the right held the fourth, fifth and sixth grades. The far room on the left housed the seventh and eighth grades. The far room on the right housed the science lab for high school students. Upstairs the room on the left was the music room for private music lessons. For most of my school years, Ivora Cantrill from South Fulton, Tennessee, provided this instruction at extra cost.

Walking south on each side of the stairs led students into the auditorium, one large room with desks in rows, east to west, facing the steps. The right-hand rows on the west side were for freshmen, then going left to the east, sophomores, juniors and seniors. Students studied at their desks, but moved to locations for class recitations, one on each side of the stage, open on the side to the auditorium and to one classroom opposite the music room in the northeast corner of the first floor. Later, electricity was installed with a drop cord for one forty-watt lamp in each classroom and four in the auditorium, and footlights on the stage. The stage was equipped for plays each high school class gave. The curtain in front of the stage had a painted scene on it that was ringed by ads painted two-foot square for local businesses. The fees they paid for the advertising were used to pay for the scenery and props for the plays. The walls were covered with photos of graduating classes from 1916 to 1927.

There was a principal, who also taught, and three other teachers, who taught subjects to their grade levels in high school. There was one grade school teacher for each of the three classrooms downstairs. They taught all subjects to all of their students.

School started the last week in August and let out in mid-April so students could help with the spring planting. The school budget could pay the teachers for the eight months. Another month lasting until mid-May was offered to students paying for this additional term.

The high school had a baseball team and football team for boys and a basketball team for girls. Games were played with such nearby towns as Wingo, Cuba, Crutchfield and others. The teachers coached these teams. Parents provided transportation for out-of-town games. When H.H. Mills arrived as principal in 1924, he created quite a stir by organizing a boy's basketball team, which was viewed as a "sissy deal" by some townspeople. I played on all three teams.

School started at 8:30, play recess came from 10:00 to 10:15, lunch from 12:00 until 1:00, and dismissal was at 3:00, Monday through Friday. Holidays were observed only if they occurred on school days. Christmas Eve through New Year's Day were considered holidays.

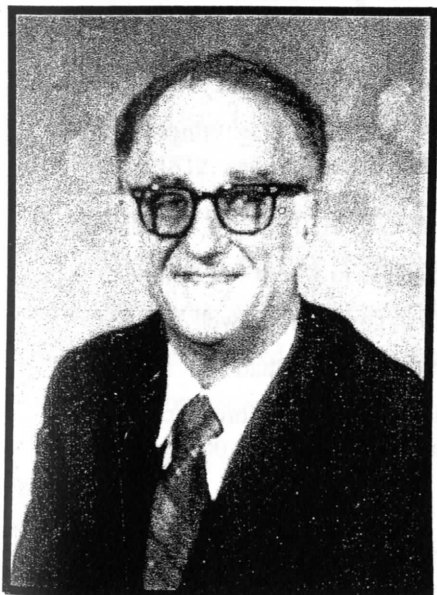
On Valentine's Day there would always be a "box supper." Eligible girls would prepare a supper in a box identified only by a big number. Each box would be auctioned off to the highest bidder among eligible boys. A girl's popularity was judged by the price the box she wrapped would bring.

Report cards were issued once a month with grades of "Excellent, Good, Poor and Fair." Days absent and times tardy were shown. Cards had to be signed by parents and returned to the teacher, who had received copies of parents' signatures at the beginning of the school year as

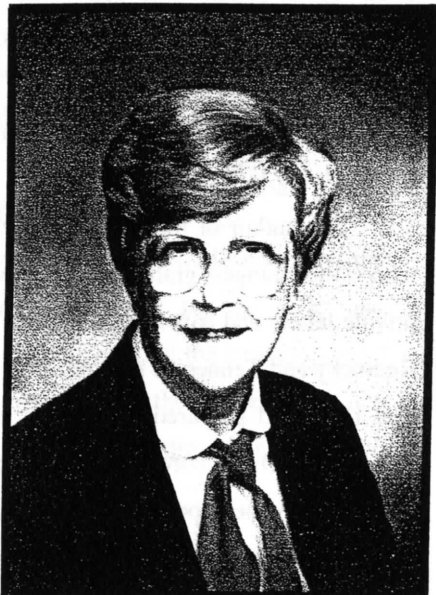
insurance against forgeries. Freshmen were required to wear a WVHS beanie cap. I wore mine to my sixtieth reunion in 1988.

I'll close with an incident that happened in nearby Fulton, not Water Valley, and it is a bit risqué. George \_\_\_\_\_ had been a conductor on the Fulton-Louisville "Fast Train" for many years, leaving Fulton at 4:00 P.M. each day for the overnight trip to Louisville and returning the next day. One day when the train backed into the interchange to head back to Louisville, he dropped off the train and walked back to his house after dark. He quietly crept up the stairs and threw open the door to his bedroom. There in bed with George's wife was his next door neighbor, Henry \_\_\_\_\_. George shot his wife, Henry and then himself. This was in the fall of 1933 while I was still working in Swift's cream station in South Fulton. We had a customer, Uncle Willie Jackson, an old man who would say to anyone telling of an incident, "Eye gads, boys, that's bad, but it could have been worse." When my father told him, though, what had happened, Uncle Willie repeated these words. Dad said, "How could it have been worse, Uncle Willie? George killed Henry, his wife and then himself!" Uncle Willie replied, "Well, eye gads! I say it could have been worse--If it been last Thursday, he might have killed me!"

And so end my random recollections of Water Valley, Kentucky, where I grew up.



**Zee Pique: 1970s**



**Frances Pennington:  
Today**