

I Remember Saluda, a Storytelling

by Charles O Hearon, III

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Checking On the Mail

The post office in Saluda now, 1994, is the most hazardous place in Polk County. The location and the traffic pattern there is Russian Roulette. At my age, I just don't go there.

If I'm forced to walk by there I just close my eyes, and stick my fingers in my ears, and look at my feet. If I could I'd run, but I can't, so I just poke along. God's been good to me so far.

It wasn't always so. The post office used to be where the telephone company is now, and the mail came to the post office from the depot after the trains ran, either up or down. And you knew which you wanted to check after, depending on where your permanent home was. Folks from Tennessee, and Louisiana, and Mississippi, and Arkansas got mail on the down-train. Folks from South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and Florida got mail on the up-train. If you didn't have much to do, you could sit on a bench and watch people come and check their post office boxes. If they came early, before the mail was "put up," they visited and chatted in groups, and went over to Dr. Little's drug store and had a coke or lemonade and waited. The most interesting of those to me were the Frost girls in bloomers and middy blouses, all three of them; the Warren girls from Louisiana Avenue in their riding britches; and little Helen Townsend in her summer wear; and all sorts of nice people.

But then there was Mrs. Webb in her big black Cadillac, and her daughters, Charlie and Rosebud. There was another daughter, but I never knew her. This "Charlie" was really a girl, and I know because she had lots of beaux. Some of them relatives of mine. Now this Rosebud child was Mrs. Webb's baby, and that she was. Mrs. Webb would hold on to Rosebud going in and out of the post office and stores and any other place like she knew that if she turned Rosebud 'alone, she'd be gone, and that she would, but not far. Just to Dr. Little's for a cherry coke or maybe a lime. Mrs. Webb never loosened that rein. "Be good to yourself, Rosebud, wherever you are."

I saw Rosebud and her husband a summer or two back, and we laughed a good laugh about all of this.

More at the Post Office

This was all nice, mild summer morning and afternoon prattle. But you just had to be there when the Bessileau girls came to the post office. Up-train people they were, from Savannah. I never saw Mr. or Mrs. Bessileau on the streets of Saluda, but those girls: Belle, the beautiful blue-eyed red head full of wisdom and good cheer and a love for living. She took control of Saluda from the post office to Smith Hill to the depot to Shand Hill to Stack House Hill to Piney Mountain. Took over the railroad ticket office, and the telegraph operator, the town police, and jail. Belle loved Saluda and Saluda loved Belle.

Josephine was the quiet one. Dark hair, soft spoken, truly a lovely person. Belle's dominant ways were "just Belle" to Josephine and she had her own ways and quiet times.

The baby girl was Catherine, who was my age and dated many of my friends. I think Catherine lived in wonder of her sisters. The Bessileaus had a boy, Devereau, but he didn't hang out with us much. The name Devereau Bessileau is odd in a place like Saluda, but we had some other as good: Lesesne, Keitt, and Porcher Smith. E. A. Raineau, Jimmie Robinson's friend, who came to Saluda each summer from New Orleans on his motorcycle. We still have Bambergers and we once had Higgenbothams, and Polk County is full of Kookendalls. We also had a boy with a first name called IdeRosset," and his last name was Myers. He was Tom Myers little

brother.

Everybody knows the story about the Kookendall child and Daddy Hart. Daddy Hart was postmaster, a merchant and coffin maker, and a political advisor, and charmer of all summer people, and a good business man. The child was just one of the Kookendall children. Mrs. Kookendall had a runny-nosed, sniffing youngan' in her house, so she sent the older child to Daddy Hart's to get ten cents worth of asafetida to make an asafetida bag to tie around the ailing child's neck, to ward off germs and any other harmful things. (This was a common home remedy in those times.) Mrs. Kookendall, being short on cash and Daddy Hart long on credit, wanted the asafetida charged to their family account. So the young child got to the store and he "howdy-de-dooed" Daddy Hart and said, "Momma wants ten cents worth of asafetida, and she wants it put on her ticket." Daddy Hart packaged up the asafetida and handed it to the youngster and said, "You take this home to your Momma and you tell her there will be no charge, because I wouldn't write down Kookendall and asafetida for what It would be worth." (It hasn't been easy for me either.)

Daddy Hart loved politics. Everybody in Saluda takes side in politics. They had an election once and it got heated. Heated is just short of shooting. Daddy Hart was strong for his man, and really wasn't impressed by the competition. Folks stood around in partisan groups talking on the street, talking about the election.

One day some of Daddy Hart's friends gathered in his store and coffin shop and cornered him and asked him this question, "Daddy Hart, you're so kind and good to folks in Saluda when they are in times of sorrow, what would you do for the opposition and the competition if you had to help out." Daddy Hart thought a minute, and he was a man never short for words, and he said, "I'd do just the same as I do for anybody else, but I'd sure put him in a chestnut coffin so he'd go through hell poppin' and a' crackln'."

**Chestnut wood was bad to pop and crack when used for firewood due to the shape of its fibers.*