

From Whiskey Peddler to Sunday School Teacher

Humble Beginnings

In the old tongue she was called Nu-tsi. Although her birthdate has not been found, various listings indicate that Nancy Scrapper was born about 1849 in Goingsnake District of the Cherokee Nation. She was born in a log cabin to Archibald Scrapper and his first wife, Malinda "Nellie" McIntosh. Her paternal grandparents were Dee-soo-gaw-skee (Scrapper) and Tiana Smith. Her maternal grandparents were Martin McIntosh and Nancy Tail.

During her early years in Scrapper Hollow she was fortunate in that numerous family and friends lived close by. Life was good. The rich soil brought forth plentiful crops and orchards sagging with fruit. Fish and game were in good supply and berries and nuts grew in abundance. Thick forests of mighty oaks and other trees provided wood for their cabins, smoke houses, and various shelters. Water gushed from nearby springs supplying ample water for the families and their livestock. Excess water filled the creek branches running through the hollow and created swimming holes where children and adults alike braved the icy cold water to bath or cool off during the summer months.

Family Gatherings

From time to time the various Scrapper families and their neighbors gathered and celebrated their lives and God's gifts to them. Rows of tables groaned under the weight of all the food prepared for the feast. Marbles and other games were played and the menfolk proved their prowess shooting arrows at cornstalks and firing their pistols at targets placed on the fence. The elders passed on stories of the old country and the infamous death march when Old Chickensnake (Andrew Jackson) drove them like cattle from their old homeland east of the mighty Mississippi River. Towards evening the singing would begin and beautiful Cherokee songs and hymns could be heard echoing through surrounding the trees and hills.

Dancing carried the celebration well into the night and usually into the wee hours of the following morning. Despite the best efforts of the womenfolk, corn whiskey generally managed to find its way into the affair and as a result occasional fist fights and shootings were known to occur.



Left to right:

Florence Foreman, Ellen Scott, Josie Snip, Minty Justice, & Nancy Gritts
Old Green Community

School days

Nancy and her sister Elizabeth were known to attend Whitmire School for awhile. They may have also attended schooling at other places in the area. Hickory Ridge School was known to exist on the ridge between Scrapper Hollow and England Hollow. It was used as both school and church. A small hollow that led from the ridge down into Scrapper Hollow, coming out near the old Arch Scrapper place, was appropriately named Schoolhouse Hollow. Scrapper School, which was believed to have come about after Nancy's schooldays, was located on the main wagon road north of the old Walkingstick home. It later became the Sanders School.

The War

The Civil War was to have enormous impact on the Scrapper family as well as all other Cherokee. It was truly war on the home front. Throughout much of the nation homes and crops were burned. Anything of value including horses and livestock, food, and clothing, was taken by the troops, leaving the already struggling families in dire straits. Nancy's aunt Sallie (Scrapper) and her husband Watie Cummings as well as their children lived close by in the hollow. Both Sallie and Watie passed away during the trials of the war. Nancy's mother succumbed to the call of death shortly after the war. Uncle George Scrapper had married Louisa McIntosh, a half-sister to Nancy's mother. George and Louisa left Scrapper Hollow at this time and they and their children, Nancy's double cousins, moved to the Pryor-Vinita region. Uncle Otter Scrapper also left, though he only moved a few miles to Wauhilla, across the road from Watt & Ned Christie. Otter married Sallie Kingfisher and their daughter, Jennie, married Ned Christie. Uncle Charley Scrapper never married as far as we know. He moved a few miles away to Welling. Gradually, Nancy's extended family of aunts, uncles, and cousins had moved on, leaving her immediate family of brothers and sisters, and her father and step-mothers to hold down the fort, so to speak.

Marriage

By 1868 Nancy had married Jesse Shell, son of John and Lucy Shell. Their daughter, Josephine 'Josie' Bertha Shell, was born October 6, 1868. Josie's Miller roll application mentions her having siblings, though little is known of them. Josie later taught school at Stilwell and became well known as Josie Hendricks.

Whiskey Peddler

Nancy ran a business of sorts in Tahlequah with her sister Louisa. Liquor and other favors were dispensed. More than once Nancy and Louisa were charged with selling intoxicating liquors. It was at this establishment (the Nancy Shell place) that Ned Christie had been drinking and socializing. After leaving her establishment, Ned headed for his sleeping quarters downtown. Before getting far, the effects of the alcohol caught up with him and he passed out nearby. As Ned lay sleeping beside Spring Creek, an outlaw named Bub Trainer killed Deputy Marshall Dan Maples. When Christie woke the next morning he was surprised to learn that Maples had been killed. Soon life became much worse for him as he was charged with the crime.

Sunday School Teacher

Later Nancy married J. B. Gritts. Rev. John Gritts was a Preacher at 'Big Shed' which was also known as Antioch Baptist Church, at Peavine, Indian Territory. Others who also

preached at Big Shed included Johnson Spade, Wolf Coon, and Adam Lacie. John's first wife, Charlotte, had passed away and Nancy became stepmother to the Gritts children. Perhaps Mr. Gritts influence helped nudge Nancy into becoming the Sunday school teacher that she would become known for throughout the region.

Nancy became very active in the community, teaching Sunday school in Scrapper Hollow, Whitmire, and Old Green Community. Ruby (Robbins) Culbertson, Josie (Thornton) Cheney, Jasper Swake, and others have related that Aunt Nancy Gritts was very strict. As children they considered her mean and harsh, but as time passed they understood that school instructors tended to be quite stern and demanding in Nancy's day. It certainly kept the boys and girls in line, the three R's, "Reading, wRiting, and aRithmetic, taught to the tune of a hickory stick." It was especially embarrassing for the student receiving discipline when he or she was ordered to go out and cut the very switch to be used to administer the punishment.

Jake Whitmire recalled that during convention time at Old Green Church, old Aunt Nancy Gritts, a matriarch of the community, would shepherd as many as 75 children during the week-long meeting, teaching them the finer and more nobler things of life.

Family Squabbles

Nancy was not happy with her father when he kept marrying young ladies after her mother had passed away. She felt he should kick back and enjoy his old age and remain single. The problem was that Arch didn't consider himself old and enjoyed having a companion around. Possibly if he had married a woman his own age, Nancy would have been content, but at least three of his last four wives were teenagers when he married them. They were all younger than Nancy and she couldn't seem to come to terms with the situation. Nancy's brothers, Arch's three sons from his first marriage, had died and it was important to him to have more sons to preserve his legacy. Despite much hardship, through determination and perseverance, he had done well for himself and planned to leave his place and his name to a son or sons. Nancy on the other hand felt that he might as well leave the place to her. She fought to drive his wives away and even used her connections in the courts to try to take control of his property. While her father wanted a wife to replace his lost sons, handle the cooking and housework, and keep him company, Nancy apparently saw this as a threat and wanted no part of it. After Arch's death, the various heirs battled over his estate for over 40 years. Nancy was not successful in trying to obtain her father's place. More and more heirs showed up hoping to claim their fair share and she passed away long before the matter was settled. The family squabble which she helped start has long since been left behind as various family members have mended and rebuilt the ties that bind them together as family.

The child laughed with glee

Whatever Nancy's weaknesses, we will celebrate her strengths. However strict she may have been, she spent her last years trying to help the children of the community. In nurturing them and teaching them right from wrong, perhaps she hoped to prevent them from falling into the same trappings that she had fallen into. Though we can't deny that she was indeed strict, today's old timers recall that as children, Aunt Nancy was always ready to provide guidance and entertainment for them. She did her best to keep them from harms way and out of trouble. At the church conventions (Revival Camps), after they completed their studies, she would set up barrels where they would bob for apples and engage in various other games. A favorite was when she set up a fishing game where the children

would swing a pole with a short string over a blanket strung between two trees. When the child reeled in the line, a small prize was found and the child laughed with glee.

Wild flowers

As a young child, Vera Opal Ward (Mrs. Merl Richard) recalled gathering wild flowers from near the spring below the old Corntassel Cemetery. Nancy Gritts stayed with the Phillips family for a while not far from the Old Green Churchhouse where she had watched over so many children. Vera further recalled that Nancy was staying in a little old shack under a huge beautiful shade tree in the front yard of the main house. Nancy was in her declining years, her hearing and sight were fading but her love for children was stronger than ever. When little Vera would appear with handfuls of flowers as gifts, Nancy's joy was profound - a fitting conclusion to an eventful life that was quietly winding down.

Nancy passed away on February 10th, 1929 in the Christie Community, Adair County, Oklahoma. She was laid to rest in the Whitmire Cemetery.

Written by Joe Scrapper Jr. based on the recollections of those who knew Aunt Nancy



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