

Our Lively Elders

By Frankye G. Awtrey

If you have grown weary of summit talks, satellites thundering skyward, hot rod cars, and sack dresses, and would like to get away from it all for a while, there is no better way than to drive down Shoal Dreek valley for a visit in the home of the Rev. William Joseph Watson, located on the lower end of the valley. The road down the valley is a beautiful road, winding like a serpent, with pine-clad slopes rising on either hand. The lower part of the valley around old Paint Rock church is a gloomy, desolate spot, but it supplies many excellent historic associations of interest. It is near this historic old church that the Watson family have lived for over a hundred years.

In the late 1830's John Watson - born 1810 - brought his young wife, Sarah Nash Watson, born 1816, and all of their worldly possessions in a two-wheeled cart from North Carolina to settle in Shoal Creek. There was born of this union eleven children. Two sons, Clement and William Watson, died in the bat-

tle of Richmond. Another son, Milton Watson, who fought under Captain Edwards, died in camp at Morrisville, Alabama in 1862. The John Watson's must have loved this valley for John Watson never left it after settling there even for a visit to Birmingham or near-by Gadsden. Sarah Watson continued to live there long after her husband and all of her eleven children had died.

It's like walking through pages of history to talk with Rev. Joe Watson, grandson of Johna & Sarah Watson. Though he is 85 years old, he has a very alert mind and a wealth of interesting historical knowledge of this section of St. Clair County. One sits spellbound as this remarkable man recalls humorous incidents of the past and his laughter rings out across the meadows and echoes from the ranges beyond. Though he is able to recall vividly events of the past and enjoys every minute of it. Joe Watson does not allow his mind to dwell on the "Good Old Days" but is avidly interested in things of the present and possibilities of the future. He enjoys life and is living every minute of it to the fullest.

He has spent his entire life in this valley, was baptised in fellowship of the Greensport Baptist Church at the age of 12,

and became an ordained minister in 1905. He served as minister to Bethany, Reeve's Grove and his own Greensport churches for over 50 years and is a charter member of the St. Clair Baptist Association. His wife, the former Bell Cash, died on Dec. 25, 1957. A daughter, Mrs. John Gupton and her family live with her father in the old home. Two other daughters, Mrs. Hubert Rinyans and Mrs. Ruby Spradley, and two sons, James and Manly Watson, live nearby.

The Watson family has played a large part in the history of this section of St. Clair County, and with 34 grandchildren and 22 great grandchildren living to carry on the family name, I feel sure that they will play a large part in the future.

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