

A History of the White Family

Part 1

As told by Arthur Benjamin (A.B.) White (16 October 1887 – 4 November 1985) in 1968 and originally transcribed by Naomi White Bruce. This document converted to electronic format by Bruce Dale White, July 2006.

NOTE: *The spellings of certain names have been corrected. This decision was made after carefully considering the philosophy of historical accuracy of the document versus the historical accuracy of the information contained therein. This document will be of better use to future generations if the information contained in it is accurate. For instance: In the original document, Holladay, Tennessee is spelled as Holiday. In the future, this misspelling could significantly impact the ability to generate relevant results of queries run against databases. As more and more historical records are transcribed into databases, this approach makes the most sense.*

*I am adding essential other information to this document. All revisions or additions will be in italics, in order to distinguish them from the original....***Bruce Dale White - 2006**

James (Jim) M. White, John *William*. White, Martha C. (Mattie) White and *Emma Cordelia* (Delia) White were born in McNairy County, Tennessee to *William Adison and Agnes Alvira Yarbrough White*. John W. White, my dad, was born in the year 1865. I do not know when they moved to Benton County, Tennessee. My uncle, Jim White, left Tennessee as a young man and went to Arkansas. There he worked as a detective for several years and from there went to Holdenville, Oklahoma and worked for the railroad. He then moved to Bells, Texas and then to Childress, Texas, where he passed away. My Aunt Mattie married Joshua (Tom) Nordin, who was a farmer. Aunt Delia married Atlas Smith, who was a farmer also.

John William White was about eighteen and was walking through the woods with some other boys, which was the only way they could go. The boy behind him had a pistol and was playing with it. Suddenly, it went off and John White was shot in the back of his right side. It did not bother him, so he wouldn't have it removed and he carried it with him to his grave.

When John White was about twenty years old, he met a girl at a party one night. Her name was Mary Alice Smith (*daughter of Benjamin Franklin Smith and Martha A. Haynes*). It was not long before they were married. I had often heard them say that they could have put all they owned in a bandana handkerchief, but that they managed somehow. They started keeping house in a little shack about two miles west of Holladay, Tennessee, where I was born in 1887. I cannot understand how they made it, except when

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two people love each other, there is always a way. I am now eighty-one (81) years old and I never once saw my Dad or Mother angry in all of their life together.

They moved from place to place, sharecropping, always looking for a better place. I remember many little things that took place. When I was about five years old, we lived in a one-room house with a lean-to. I remember one Christmastime especially. One night, just after dark, it came an earthquake, the only one I ever felt. We had a little dog, named Charlie. Dad had managed somehow to get himself a shotgun and across the road was timber. It rained one night and a neighbor, Dock Rust, came over to go squirrel hunting. When Dad picked up his shotgun, Charlie made for the woods. When he would tree a squirrel, he would bark about three times. When Dad fired his gun, Charlie would be gone after another squirrel. They killed about thirteen squirrels in one hour.

In the spring, when Dad started plowing, Charlie would go hunting for snakes. About two years before the above event, we lived in a two-room log house with a lean-to. My sister Lucy was born there. We moved across the creek and Dad had somehow made enough money to buy a team of mules. He rented a farm of east of this place and I remember three things that happened there. It seems that it was spring, and my Granddad and Grandmother (Smiths) came to visit us from Springfield, Missouri. He kept a little packet of sugar in his pocket to sweeten his coffee.

About this time, or first Democrat was elected President, Grover Cleveland. During his term of office, money was scarce and there was a money panic. I have heard my Dad say that people almost starved to death. You could buy eighteen pounds of sugar or coffee for \$1.00, but we couldn't get a dollar to buy it with. That summer, we had a good garden and my mother made a 50-gallon barrel of sauerkraut. One day my Dad and another man made a seine and carried the homemade, white, oak split, basket, that would hold about one bushel, and we went down to the creek. In just a short time, we had that basket full of big trout.

About this time, I started school, which was about one mile from home. I had to go through the woods and about half way, I met a sheep that would not get out of the way and let me pass, so I went back home and ate my lunch. My dad went with me the next day. My teacher's name was Will Kelly, a young man. As I said before, I am eighty-one (81) and Will Kelly has a son living in Amarillo, Texas today in 1968.

Yesterday was October 16th, my birthday, and I can still remember many little things that took place in those days at the school, which was a one-room log house. There were two grown girls going to school and one day at noon, these two girls went up the road about $\frac{1}{4}$ of a mile to a house to get some peaches. They were a little late in getting back, so the teacher made them stand up in the corner with their nose in a ring for some time. At the end of the school term, he married one of them.

Once a boy, about ten years old, did something he shouldn't have and the teacher put him in an old box by the wood stove, shut the door and left him in there for about an hour. One Sunday morning, I was visiting a friend of mine named Hub Morris, and we went

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roaming in the woods. We came upon a hole in the ground and crawled in to see how deep it was. We went through it on our hands and knees and came out a long distance in the woods.

At Christmas time, there was a family who lived on the farm just east of us. Their house was about three hundred feet off of the road, with a persimmon tree about twenty or thirty feet high in the front. Someone cut the tree down, trimmed the stump and then took off a rear wheel off of a new wagon and put it down so tightly, that the man had to dig a hole as big as the wheel and deep enough to get the stump out by the roots, just to get the wheel out. On another cold night, three men went to a home, in which a widow and her grown daughter lived alone. One man went to the chimney corner and made an old hen squall several times. When the woman opened the door, another man threw a bucket of cold water in her face. I can't repeat what she said, because it could not be printed.

One day, my mother went to visit some friends named Melton, and of course, my sister and I had to go along. The house was on one side of the road and the barn was on the other side. It was a big, log barn and the front end had not been closed up. It had rained the night before. I saw a big hornet's nest and picked up a wet corncob, which I threw at the nest. Before the cob hit the nest, a hornet hit me between the eyes and I did not tarry long enough to see if I had knocked the nest down. I have since read, that when hornets have nests, they always have a watchman or lookout. After that happened, I am convinced this is true. One night, after my dad and I had visited the Meltons and were on our way home, Charlie was trying to tree an opossum. We stepped off of the road a few feet and some kind of animal came down the road. We could just see the bulk of it down in the flat, and it then ran into some hogs and made them squeal. Will Melton had been to see this girl one night, and on his way home his mule refused to go any further, when he reached the flats where the creeks ran together. He turned his mule around and spent the night with us and we never found out what kind of animal it was.

As I said before, by this time Dad had a good team of mules and he rented some land down close to Holladay, Tennessee. The farm had a big house, about five hundred feet off of the road. On the south side of the house was a vineyard. We lived in the small house down in the pasture for the first year. There was a graveyard about a half of a mile down the road. There was a story told about a girl, concerning that graveyard. Supposedly, the folks who had lived in our house before we did had a sixteen-year-old daughter. It was said that she was not afraid to go to the graveyard by herself, at night. Someone had told her to go to the graveyard, and then stick a fork into the ground, located inside the fence. As the story goes, she went to the cemetery, walked inside and bent down and stuck the fork into the ground. In doing so, she caught the hem of her dress with the fork, and when she rose up, her dress was caught and she fell over dead. (Now that could not happen today with these mini-skirts. If they can truthfully call them skirts, with them lacking at least 12 inches being long enough.)

We had a sweet apple tree out in the pasture. The juice was dark, but good to drink. We gathered the apples one day and made a barrel of cider. The next day was the Fourth of July and nearly every community had a barbeque. Dad hitched his mules to the wagon

and took the barrel of cider to Morgan's Mill, to sell it at the barbeque. He didn't sell it there, so he went that afternoon to the picnic on Birdsong Creek, between Holladay and Westport, where I was attending the festivities. He had hardly stopped the mules, when it began to rain. He drove off home and left me at the picnic. About dark, he came riding up on one of the mules to get me. I was never so glad to see anyone, as I was to see my dad, because I had walked with the Kelly's up to their house and my clothes are wet. I didn't have any underwear on because I didn't have any, and I was afraid I was going to have to spend the night with the Kelly's.

One thing I forgot to mention, was the time when I was about four years old, we were going somewhere in the wagon and my mother pointed up a small creek, a part of Sycamore Creek, to the west, and said there is a lead mine up there, where the soldiers used to come and got lead to make their bullets.

The next year, we moved up to the big house, where there was lots of room. This house was known as the Hatley place. Now, I don't remember just how long we lived at the Hatley place, but I think it was two or three years. We raised peanuts for our money crop. My dad and a man named Stafford Arnold, invested and hired a blacksmith by the name of Scott, to make the first plow we had ever seen to cut off the top roots of the peanuts and leave them in the field. We would then take the pitchfork and pick up the peanuts, shake off the dirt, then stack them in two rows on every third row. Next, we would let the peanuts cure until all of the moisture was gone, then we would put a long pole in the ground, just deep enough so that it would stand up. Then, we would take four sticks and put them around the poles, so that they would be six to eight inches off of the ground, and then hang the peanuts on them, so they wouldn't rot. We would stack the peanuts around each pole to the top and cap the poles, to turn off the rain and keep them dry. There would be a stack every thirty or forty feet. This finished our work until the weather was cooler and the peanuts were dry. We would take our homemade, white oak, split baskets and begin picking the peanuts by hand. When the weather got so cold that we needed a fire, we would bring the stacks to the fire and throw the vines behind us in a half-circle, to break the cold wind and keeping it from blowing on us. We put the peanuts in five-bushel bags and seamed them up with a homemade needle, made of hickory wood. When the wagon was full, my dad would haul them to the Tennessee River, about fifteen miles away at Rockport Landing, and then load them on the boat to take to the market. He could sell them for fifty cents per bushel. He was really in the money, for that was the only way we had to make any money.

We also raised cane and molasses. We didn't need a lot of money, because there were no shows to see, no ice cream to eat, no toys to play with. When a child heard of some other child having a little red wagon and wanted one, our dads would cut a gum tree, saw off a thin cut and make some wheels and we would soon have us a wagon. Once, when I was grinding the cane, I got in a hurry because the sun was going down and I already had a pan full of juice, the mule I had hitched to the mill, pulled the pan full of juice off into the fire and covered the pan. That night, someone built a fire and the next morning, we had a pan full of candy.

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About this time, a Mr. Newt Watson moved from Marysville, Tennessee, to a house across the road from us. A Mrs. Townsend lived nearby and she had a daughter, who I thought the world of, but I was always too bashful to tell her. One of the Watson boys married her.

In 1898, we had a bad winter. It came a light snow, melted a little and then for a couple of days, we had a sleet storm that froze everything hard. People ran out of wood to burn in Holladay. My dad led his mules to the blacksmith shop and had some ice shoes put on them. He and Mr. Arnold went down to the creek bottom and cut down small trees and dragged them on the ice into town for everyone that needed wood. They were busy for several days.

Across the road from us lived a man and his wife named Vickry. One day, they quarreled and separated. Later, Mr. Vickry came back to get some of his clothes and his wife locked the door and wouldn't let him in. My dad and Mr. Arnold started downtown, and as they got even with the Vickry house, Mr. Vickry was breaking the door down. They stopped to watch him and later Mrs. Vickry sued my dad and Mr. Arnold for helping him. They were in court for two years before it was finally settled.

In 1899, I was 13 years old and going to school. My teachers name was John McIllwain. In the winter, I was moved out of the small room and into the big room. I won a prize for being the best reader in the school. Just before the end of the school day on Fridays, we would have a spelling bee. Everyone in the big room would line up around the wall. If you were on the end and everyone missed a word, but you spelled it, you would go to the head of the class. Once, I out spelled the whole school. One of the girls in the class is living in Oklahoma now. Another lives in Amarillo, Texas. I really thought I was something.

About this time, two brothers named George and Mart Barber lived on joining farms. They also owned a store in Holladay. In the fall of 1900, they sold it and they and their families, and my Uncle Atlas Smith and family moved to Hopkins County, Texas. My Uncle Tom Nordin and his family were already there. My family moved to George Barber's farm, where there was a big house and barn. There my dad planted about ten acres of cotton, the first I ever remember seeing.

In the fall of 1901, when the cotton opened, we took our white oak, split-bushel baskets and picked it full of cotton. We would empty it into a bigger basket. When it was full, we would empty it into a pen. The year before, Burr Woods built a cotton gin on the edge of Holladay. He had to feed the gin by hand, take the cotton out by hand and put it in the press. The seed was thrown away, because they were not good for anything. Dad and another man took some boards and made a drum, bored some holes in it, put some handles and a tongue to it and called it a cotton planter. In those days, cottonseed was planted on a ridge. When the plants were about five inches high, Dad would take the turning plow and run it on each side of the cotton. Then we would take the hoe and scrape the crab grass from around the cotton. Dad would take another plow and put the dirt back around the cotton.

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By this time, I was big enough to ride a mule and take a turn of corn to Grandpa's water mill and have it ground into meal. Grandpa (*Agnes Yarbrough White's 2nd husband*) would measure the corn, and then take out one fifth for grinding. I believe it was the same year that we raised some wheat, and when it ripened, the neighbors would go help one another. They would take the scythe and cut the wheat by hand with one swing. One swing could cut a bundle and then six or eight stalks would be tied around the bundle. When it dried, we would gather it and put it into a stack, readied for someone to come with a thresher, powered by mules or horses. I remember that I went with Dad, to take some wheat to a flourmill for grinding into flour, up on the banks of the Sandy River near Westport, Tennessee. It must have been a waterwheel. Once, my dad went to Westport and came home with a lamp chimney that a man had sold him on the promise that it could not be broken. Dad proceeded to show us that it was unbreakable by dropping it on the floor. It shattered into hundreds of pieces. The first circus that I ever saw was at Westport. About the only thing I remember about it is a thirty- foot snake, which they said weighed 150 pounds. Two men helped a woman put it around her neck.

About this time, Dad and Uncle Atlas Smith went to Huntington, about ten miles west of Westport. It was hot, so they put their team in a wagon yard and walked around town. They came upon a Negro meeting (*for modern readers, this refers to a Religious Service held by African-Americans in a time of legalized segregation*), so they went in. They hadn't been there long, when a big Negro man told them that white folks weren't allowed in the meeting wearing their shirtsleeves. (*for modern readers, this refers to not wearing a suit coat and tie.*) They then left the meeting. Between Huntington and Westport, there was a bubbling spring in the middle of the road. The water was so cold, that you could hardly drink it. Huntington was the first place that I ever of having artesian water.

We didn't raise peanuts on the Baker farm, but we did raise some good corn. When the tassels began to fade, we would strip the leaves from the cornstalks by hand. It would take the leaves from four or five stalks to make a bundle. They would stay on the ground for a few days, until the leaves wilted good, and then we would gather the bundles up and put them in a stack or haul them to the barn. This was fodder and it made good food for the stock.

A widow lived nearby, who had an eighteen yea-old daughter. She came down with a fever that made her so wild that it took two men to hold her down on the bed. She said that she could see the devil coming to get her. Our pastime was squirrel hunting and fishing. Mother would not let us hunt or fish on Sunday. So, on Sunday, just after the sun came up, Buford Kirk and Mr. Arnold would come by and we would play marbles until Mother had dinner ready. We would eat, and then go back to marble playing until dark. They only had preaching at the Baptist Church in Holladay once a month and no Sunday School.

When I was about ten years old, the Methodists built a church house about one half of a mile from where we lived, and they started a Sunday School. My dad and mother went to Morgan's Mill for something and found a suit of clothes that would fit me. That was my first suit. When Sunday came, my mother helped me to put my suit on and combed my

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hair and sent my sister and I to Sunday School. One incident I remember well happened there. They had a revival one night and a girl fainted. They had to cut her corset off, because she had it on so tightly that she couldn't read. About this time, women began to wear the bustle, but they didn't last long.

Some time in 1900 or 1901, Dock Rust, a friend of ours, came back from Texas and told us of a bumper crop of cotton they had in 1900. He said that you could drop cottonseed down anywhere and they would come up and make cotton. That was the year of the Galveston flood. My dad and Mr. Rust were close friends and the cotton crop was often the conversation of the day. My dad had a light case of Texas fever, but we just couldn't go to Texas because of finances. As the days went by, Dad told Mr. O.P. Kirk, another close friend that was well off financially, about Texas. Mr. Kirk was a farmer that owned a lot of land near Holladay and raised hogs. They talked to Mr. Newt Watson and got him interested. Mr. Watson was a renter (tenant farmer) also.

Mr. Kirk went to Texas to visit the Bakers in the fall of 1902. He came home and told the same kind of story that Mr. Rust had told, so the Texas fever got higher. Mr. Campbell Allen, who lived across the Tennessee River, got in touch with them and contracted Texas fever. He was a renter, as well. They got together and decided that when the 1903 crop was harvested, they would all go to Texas together. The fever was running high, and we could hardly wait. We made a pretty good crop that year, so when it was sold and the hogs and cows were sold, Dad had a little money. I can remember that he sold one cow for nine dollars, and thought he had got a very good price.

About December 20, 1903, John White and wife, boys and a daughter; O.P. Kirk, wife, son and daughter; Newt Watson, wife, three boys and two girls; and J.C. Allen, wife, two sons and one daughter drove to Westport, Tennessee, with all we owned on four wagons. We loaded all of our household goods in one end of a boxcar, put eight heads of mules in the other end, took the wheels off of the wagons and stacked them in the boxcar. Mr. Watson rode in the boxcar to take care of the mules, and the rest of us rode in the passenger train. This was our first ride on a train.

We arrived at Sulphur Springs, Texas December 21, 1903, and our friends were there to meet us. The Allens went home with my Uncle Atlas Smith, who lived just a short distance from the Allen farm, on a farm he rented. The O.P. Kirks went with the George Babers. The Whites and Watsons went to Andrew Pettigrew's, about three miles from where we were going to live. The next morning, dad, Mr. Watson and Mr. Pettigrew went back to town, but the boxcar had not arrived.

I remember the night of December 24, 1903, very well. The 21st, 22nd, 23rd and 24th were nice, warm, summer-like days. On Christmas Eve morning, the men went to unload the boxcar. It was overloaded, and they had to dig up some extra freight money. About three o'clock, they came driving up to Mr. Pettigrew's. Dad and Mr. Pettigrew told Mr. Eph Watson and I to take the wagon down to the farm, leave it and drive the mules back. It was still nice and warm, but there was a small cloud to the north. It wasn't very large and didn't look bad. We had only gone about a half of a mile, when it began to rain a

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little, just like a summer shower. We went in Joe and Don Campbell's barn until it was over. It lasted about 20 minutes, and then we started on. Before we made the other two and a half miles, we almost froze. There were fourteen of us in the group. I don't remember how we slept, but Christmas morning came and it was cold. A pond near us was frozen three to four inches deep.

It warmed up in the afternoon and we went down and started a fire and unloaded the wagon. The house had five or six rooms. The Watsons lived on the west side and the Whites lived on the east. We got along like two black-eyes peas in one pot. The Watsons were one of the finest families in Texas. That was 65 years ago, and three of the boys and one girl now live in Duncan, Oklahoma.

During January and February, we had several big snows. I remember neither the Watsons nor us had a gun, so the boys cut a club about 24 inches long to use as a weapon. None of us had seen a jackrabbit, until we came to Texas. The boys would get their clubs and start out across the pasture in a half-moon circle. When the rabbit would jump out of the grass or snow, we would throw our clubs at it, and one of us usually got it. We ate those rabbits, because that was the only fresh meat that we could afford. We soon learned to cut the hind legs off about three inches up the backbone and hang them up to dry and freeze. They really made good eating.

Once and a while, we would go to Sulphur Springs to get flour, coffee and some sow bellies. We always got some Brier Rabbit Molasses and beans too. I can remember going with them and when dinnertime came, we would go to the Tennessee Hotel, an old frame building, just east of the courthouse. They served meals family style, and for 35 cents, you could eat dinner. Every few minutes, a red haired boy would come in and yell, "Biscuits".

The Watsons and Whites just had enough money to make a crop, but we were expecting to get rich that fall, raising cotton. One day in the spring, we went to town and parked the wagon near a man's house, who had two greyhounds. When we left, the dogs had become friends with the horses and followed us home. Those were the first greyhounds we had ever seen, and we almost ran them to death chasing jackrabbits. We tried to run the dogs off to home, but they wouldn't leave. So one day, one of the boys tied a can to the dog's tail and they left and didn't come back.

Spring came, so we began to plow and get ready to plant our cotton. We got good stand, but the rains didn't come and we didn't make as much as we had expected. We gathered the crop and sold it. After the sale, we just enough money to try another crop. By the time that we were done gathering the crop, Mr. Watson had the blues so badly, that he decided to leave and go up to Walters, Oklahoma. That left us with the entire farm, so we went back to work and plowed during the winter, when the weather was warm enough. By then, we had got a shotgun, which we used to kill fox squirrels, and they were good eating. I would tan the hides and make shoestrings. Some time in the spring, it came a big rain, which put Sulphur Creek out of its banks and flooded the bottoms. Buford Kirk and Mr. Allen had come to visit us, and they all decided to go see the creek, about three miles

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from home. I rode behind Dad on one of the mules. The mules had to swim across the creek. We made a very good crop that year. In the summer, after the cotton was picked, the men and boys got in the wagons and drove over to Cooper, about ten miles away. There we found a watermelon that weighed 90 pounds and bought it. We ate all we could, while we were there in Cooper.

I remember the first time that we ever went to Peerless, or Fairland, as this was the true name of the town. There were some old men talking, and one told about being out on the plains in the early days. He said that several were going to Lubbock and a band of Indians began chasing them. They ran into a canyon, but when they got deep into it, the walls were so high and straight, that they couldn't go any further. He said that all of the Indians were still coming toward them, but they were cornered. At this, he stopped talking, so after a bit one of the other men said, "What happened?" The man said, "Why, they killed every one of us!"

That fall, we rented a farm next to Mr. Allen, from McCrisp. It was black land, and we had never seen the black land before. When it rained, you couldn't leave tracks in mud because you took your tracks with you. That winter, we cut cotton and corn stacks and burned them. The land had to be dry before you could plow, but by the time planting season came we had everything ready. We sure meant to get rich on this black land and I did make some good corn and cotton, but we had a little trouble. We got our corn planted, and had a good stand of it. The cotton came up good too, but then it began to rain and the cockleburs came up so thick that we couldn't get into the fields to cut them. By the time it got dry enough to work in the fields, they were so much higher and thicker than the corn and cotton that we had to plow everything up and replant. We did make a good crop that year.

That winter of 1906 - 1907, was so warm, that it didn't seem like winter. Dad decided that he would plant some cotton in March. Well, we got a good stand of cotton early. Dad was trying to get the first bale on the market, so he would win a prize. By the time the stalks had five or six leaves, there must have been three or four boll weevils on every stalk, waiting for the cotton boll to appear. That year, someone made up a song about a boll weevil just sitting on a fence post, looking for home, just looking for a home. Just as our corn was ready to tassel in June, it began to rain. We needed to plow, but it still rained until suckers came out on almost every corn stalk, and we couldn't get into the field to pull them off. I think every sucker made a pretty good ear of corn. We really made a crop that year and we were ready for it. Dad always got up at four in the morning, as well as the rest of the family.

One morning, when cotton-picking time came, we were waiting at the end of the row for it to get light enough to see the cotton. Most of the time, the dew was so heavy on the cotton that it looked like rain. We couldn't go far until we were wet. We had a water barrel at the corner of the porch, near the fence. Johnie, my four-year-old brother, was playing with something on the porch and dropped it into the water barrel. When he reached over to get it, he slipped into the barrel, head first. It turned over, and he crawled out and came back to the house, before any of us knew anything about it. In those years,

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when winter came, you would see a black cloud come up in the North, and it would be nice and warm at the time, but within 30 minutes, it would turn so cold that there would be ice. George Bullington lived on the farm next to Mr. Allen. Once, he was cutting stalks and saw a black cloud coming up. He thought that he would make one more round of the field and go to the barn, but by the time he got there, ice was on the corn stalks and cutter.

In the fall of 1907, I went home with Mr. Kirk, in order to go to school in Holladay, Tennessee. I stayed until the middle of January and came home to Texas. That was the last of my schooling. In the spring of 1908, we organized a Union Sunday School at Sunny Slope School House, and I was elected the teacher.



Picture 1 -William Adison and Agnes Alvira Yarbrough White, parents of Martha, James, John and Emma White. Circa 1858 in McNairy County, Tennessee, thought to be wedding photograph.

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Picture 2 - John William White, circa 1885



Picture 3 - Mary Alice Smith White, circa 1885



Picture 4 - John William White, circa 1925



Picture 5 - Mary Alice Smith White, circa 1900



**Picture 6 - Martha "Mattie" C. White Nordin,
sister of John W. White**



**Picture 7 - Emma Cordelia White Smith, sister of
John W. White**



**Picture 8 - James "Jim" White, brother of John
W. White 1930's**



**Picture 9 - Arthur Benjamin White
son of John W. White and author of this paper,
circa 1907**