

DADDY'S FIDDLE

Daddy could play almost any string instrument available at the time. He primarily played the Fiddle and Banjo. As a young man he heard a neighbor man play the fiddle. He was playing "Turkey in the Straw", which is a fast moving folk dance song. The neighbor gave Daddy the fiddle and said, "Now son you play it." Daddy did play it completely by ear. After that anything he could hear he could play. We especially loved to hear him play "Sweet Hour of Prayer". He could really make that fiddle talk. He could also play the handsaw with his fiddle bow. Playing the handsaw is a lost art. He would place the handle part of the saw on his knee and hold the tip between his thumb and fingers. The notes are made by the way the tip is bent.



CLAUDE R. GLEAVES
1886-1971

He and his brothers all played instruments and would sit in the back of farm wagons and play for the community square dances. Then Daddy became a Christian! In those days the church was very opposed to dancing of any sort. Therefore, Daddy quit playing. He let another person borrow his fiddle. Eventually it was played on the Grand Ole Opry (country music) at the Ryman Auditorium in Nashville, TN. Years later the fiddle was found backstage at the Ryman. The body of the fiddle had become unglued and was in pieces. The fiddle was returned to my uncle to be returned to Daddy. However, it stayed in Uncle Kelly's attic for years and was forgotten.

Our oldest brother Richard lived with our uncle because we were so poor we could not feed him and Daddy was sick. Richard lived with Uncle Kelly for ten or twelve years. One day they were cleaning in the attic, when Richard saw the fiddle and asked Uncle Kelly what it was. He was told, "That is your Daddy's fiddle. Richard asked to bring it home to Daddy on their next visit. Richard was brought home to see us on Sunday afternoons. So the fiddle got back to Daddy.

Daddy had the fiddle repaired by Oscar Wright, a local cabinet maker, but not a musician. The fiddle originally had wooden tuners and they were replaced with metal ones because the wooden ones could not be found. The metal tuners would slip and it was hard to keep the fiddle in tune. The body of the fiddle was reglued. Some of the repairs he made changed the sound. Daddy tried numerous things to make the sound what he wanted but was never able to produce what he heard in his head. He even scrapped off the finish on the back of it but nothing helped.

We remember many things about Daddy and his fiddle. One of the most vivid memories is during electrical storms. We lived in an old house on the top of a hill. It would be storming with the lightning flashing at night and we would all be gathered around the fireplace, with only coal oil lamps for light. Daddy would play the fiddle a while and then tell a ghost story. He would then go back to fiddling until he thought of another story. He would scare us to death as the old house was creaking and popping in the wind. The thunder would make it shake. He was such a vivid storyteller we just knew he had experienced them. As Daddy kept our thoughts from the storm we would often pop popcorn in an old popper which you had to shake over the coals. If sweet potatoes were available we would bake them in the hot ashes.

He tried to teach us to square dance while he played and did the calling. However, that usually turned out with us boot scooting our feet around. We thought we were dancing but we were really just acting silly.

Mama was also an accomplished musician. Occasionally Daddy would accompany her as she played hymns on an old pump organ.

As he grew older and could not move his fingers as fast as he wished, he would go off alone and play until we coached him into playing for the family. He also played a lot when he was lonely.

We were very poor but we had the best Daddy, anyone could have. He had a severe heart attack in 1939, the year Owen was born. He was never able to work out in the public again. He farmed with our help and we survived. He died in 1971 but we still miss him.

Memories of: Frances Gleaves Nichols and her brother Owen Carver Gleaves.