

Loar, 86, Born in Pioneer Home, Recalls Early Mill, Silk Culture

BY HENRY P. SCALF

James H. Loar was born at Betsy Layne in a house built by the pioneer James Shannon Layne, his great-grandfather. He had lived either on the exact spot or within a few yards of the site a long, rich lifetime of 86 years.

All around Uncle Jim, as his neighbors call him, and his wife, Pollyann, only three years younger, is history. He can conjure it all up for you because he is steeped in the lore of his people.

Uncle Jim is a rugged bit of history himself. He has logged, farmed and "sold goods." He plowed again this year, can show you an excellent garden. "I was a bit late in getting it in, but it's fine, though," he says.

Talk to him and soon you know there are two stories, one about himself, of which he will scarcely talk, the other about his people, who settled the town in 1796, four years after Kentucky was made a state and four years before Floyd county was organized.

He is a product of the land upon which he has lived so long. Rugged and "square," he dislikes dishonesty. He "took everybody to be honest" years ago but found out they weren't. He paid notes for other people, had to sell land to do it. He has given each of his three children a home, could have given them more, "if everybody had been honest."



Mr. and Mrs. James H. Loar, of Betsy Layne, sit on their front porch a great deal these days, enjoying the serene peace that comes from a lifetime on the land.

For decades his home has offered generous hospitality. It was a mecca years ago for preachers, salesmen and travelers of all kinds. Congressmen and governors have eaten at his house. Pollyann kept a "settin' table", and the food was good and the welcome warm and pleasant.

That home was a big, two-story house, standing on the exact spot where James Shannon Layne, immigrant from Amherst county, Virginia, and his wife, Caty Hager Layne, daughter of the Hessian sol-

dier, John Hager, built their permanent residence in the new state of Kentucky. Uncle Jim tore down the original ten-room Layne residence and rebuilt it, sometimes after he and Pollyann Nunnery were married in 1897.

It was a matter of deep regret that it was necessary to raze his great-grandfather's house. It was for many years the finest in the region. Rev. R. L. Landrum, a much-traveled Methodist circuit rider,

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stayed there in 1837, wrote in his Life and Travels: "Our first quarterly meeting was held about the middle of December at James S. Layne's who was well prepared to support such meetings. In fact, I thought it was one of the best homes I had ever found in all my travels."

Loar also tore down the Layne slave house but continued to use the old well. That well was dug by the human chattels of the Layne family around 150 years ago.

He has many changes in Big Sandy in the last eighty years, he says as he looks out at the whizzing traffic on U. S. 23. That road was a wagon-rutted trail when he was a boy. During the Civil War it was far worse than that. Gen. "Bull" Nelson, after licking the Confederates at Ivy Mountain, reported to his superior on the state of that road, said he had to stop pursuing Col. Andrew Jackson May and camp ten miles out of Pikeville. He yielded to battle fatigue and the sloppy road, pitched his tents near the old Layne home.

Two or three hundred feet from the present home of Jim Loar the Laynes had a horse mill where corn and wheat were ground. Jim Loar went to work driving a horse there when he was ten years old. People brought grain in covered wagons from as far away as Catlettsburg after the Civil War. Uncle Jim remembers seeing, while a mere lad,

river and tying up at the Layne landing. The mill ground as high as 300 bushels of grain some days.

The horse mill reminds Uncle Jim of the famous Nancy Honaker mule. It lived, he and many oldsters affirm, to be 67 years old. James S. Layne acquired the mule in a swap with a North Carolina trader long before the Civil War. It was a young brute then but gentle, and he gave it to his daughter Nancy. She rode her beloved mule as long as it lived. It's age made it famous in the section. Everybody calling it Nancy Honaker's mule. Jim Loar drove his grandmother's mule many days around the wide sweep of the horse mill tread.



Stephen G Loar 3-I-1840 ; I-22-1900



Bellva Dorah

His Wife 2-I9-1845 ; I-15-1933

My Grandmother Loar had as fine a set of false teeth as I ever saw in my life. I was fourteen years of age when learned, they were not her natural teeth.

One might assume with some degree of proximity that sixty years ago, false teeth could be acquired that closely resembled the real thing.

Today the average set of false teeth display falseness upon first glance. Anyway, the thought is that getting false teeth sixty years ago must have been more painful and costly than today.

Grandmother Loar got her false teeth when they lived in California.

So going back in time just a few more years finds that mankind really had to suffer with problems of teeth and eyes.

No doubt but that many people were "cut down" in their activities by inability to properly feed their body, and see well enough to perform duties of livelihood and "around the place " chores.

With what little pain one endures "now adays" with an aching tooth, it is wonder how years ago one survived with constant throbs of misery from more than one sickly tooth.

It was not uncommon to see a person with teeth either worn down to the gums, rusted away or broken.

One cannot be told that many years ago a bad tooth did not hurt as one of today.

It was not uncommon to see a person that could thread a needle, but not be able to see who was at the front gate.

Then there was those who could identify their cow way up on the hillside, but not see a cup of coffee set upon the table.

Headaches from eye disorder and toothache must have been a common ailment. Yet the voice of complaint was seldom heard. Now adays it would be a continual cry. So how did one, in those days, go about contending with such miseries?

Everyone did not long survive. Everyone did not have the endurance of will and fortitude to outlast the poisoness effects of poor teeth. Everyone did not avoid the pitfalls of accidents prevalent to the failing eye.

Falling down a flight of stairway has been the demise of many people.

A rebelling stomach has claimed many a life.

With all the fearsome disorders that are assiduously destroying body and mind in todays life, it is with great relief in conscience we economically avoid the troubles of eye and tooth failure.

Stephen studied his Grandparents Loar. His Grandfather was perhaps a little shorter in height than Stephen. But he was a big man. A big boned man. He was a very quiet soft spoken person. Stephens Grandmother perhaps gened Stephen his small bones and dark complexion. But there stopped resemblance, between them and Stephen.

Their son Rody just looked like a Loar except he had his Mothers grey-green eyes. Stephens cousin Frank was just out and out Loar. Big man, quiet to the point of shyness.

Aunt Dockies two boys could have well carried the name Loar instead of George. Dockie was so energetic she appeared to never rest. But her energy was well directed. Stephen had no defined direction for his energy. But yet Stephen spent more time around Dockie than any Loar, except his family and his Grandparents. Somewhere there was a touch of sameness in Stephens mind, between he and Dockie.

Yet after leaving Betsy Layne, Stephen could not convince himself, in all fairness that he was like any Loar he knew. Sometimes he cared little if he was not like any Loar or Senter.

Sometimes he wondered if he must pay a price in society because he was neither Loar or Senter.

Early in the spring of 1937 Stephen could feel acceptance of fate closing in on him. He worked harder in school, he became wilder in his social life. He pounded that punching bag. He talked to everybody he could, trying to get a lead on himself with what should he do upon graduating from High School.

One night his Father said, maybe he should give the Army or Navy some thought.

One monday there was no school. He hitch-hiked to Prestonsburg. He went to the Post Office and got papers on each branch of the Armed Services. The Betsy Layne Post Office didnt have any.

After a few days he wrote a letter to the United States Coast Guard Service. It wasnt long before he recieved a reply. In the end he filled out the papers and sent them in. Then he had to get a recommendation from Congressman Jack May. That he did also. Jack May was related to his Grandmother Loar.

He didnt tell anyone. Not even his Parents.

It was but a few days till graduation and he had one more set of papers to send in about his completion of High School. So when the time rolled around, he did that. Now it was just wait.

So when the papers came in that he had been accepted and if still interested to report to so and so at Huntington W.Va., for medical examination, he was elated.

So he told his Father and Mother. You would think from the heekack, that he had but definately concluded all consideration to the fact he wasnt Loar or Senter.

They surmised also that he should not be so hasty, and take the summer to think otherwise of his future. So thats what happened.

The walkways was of native stone, taken from outcroppings on the bank of the river. Most slabs of the rock was about three feet by four feet and four to five inches thick.

~~Mortar~~ Mortar for the brick work was made by burning finely ground stone and clay and then lime was added. Side walls and backwalls of the fireplace was made from local clay and the brick was coarser and much larger than the chimney brick. It was yellow of color.

The mantels and hearth was of a very fine grained stone, which had a bluish-grey color. It was said, that stone was brought in from Ohio.

The upstairs of the house had four large bedrooms. Sometimes a preferred traveler would have one of these bedrooms instead of sleeping in the quarters building. The downstairs had a living room, sitting room, dining room, kitchen and bedroom.

The entry hallway, first floor, recessed a few feet to the stairway that was of direct approach, then a landing and reversed itself on to the second floor.

To the left of the entry hall was the sitting room, to the right, the dining room.

Directly behind the stairway was a bedroom, entry to bedroom, either from the kitchen or living room, which was behind the sitting room. It was told that the bedroom was surprisingly cool in summer.

There was four fireplaces downstairs, living room, sitting room, dining room and the bedroom. There was a fireplace in all upstairs bedrooms.

The porch columns of the original house was of wood, when remodeled, they were replaced with brick. The brick came from Carter County Kentucky.

The front of the fireplace was redone, some plain, and some decorated glazed tile about two by five inches being placed over the brick. This tile came from Ironton Ohio.

The original windows remained. They were about three feet wide and extended from ceiling to about fourteen inches from the floor.

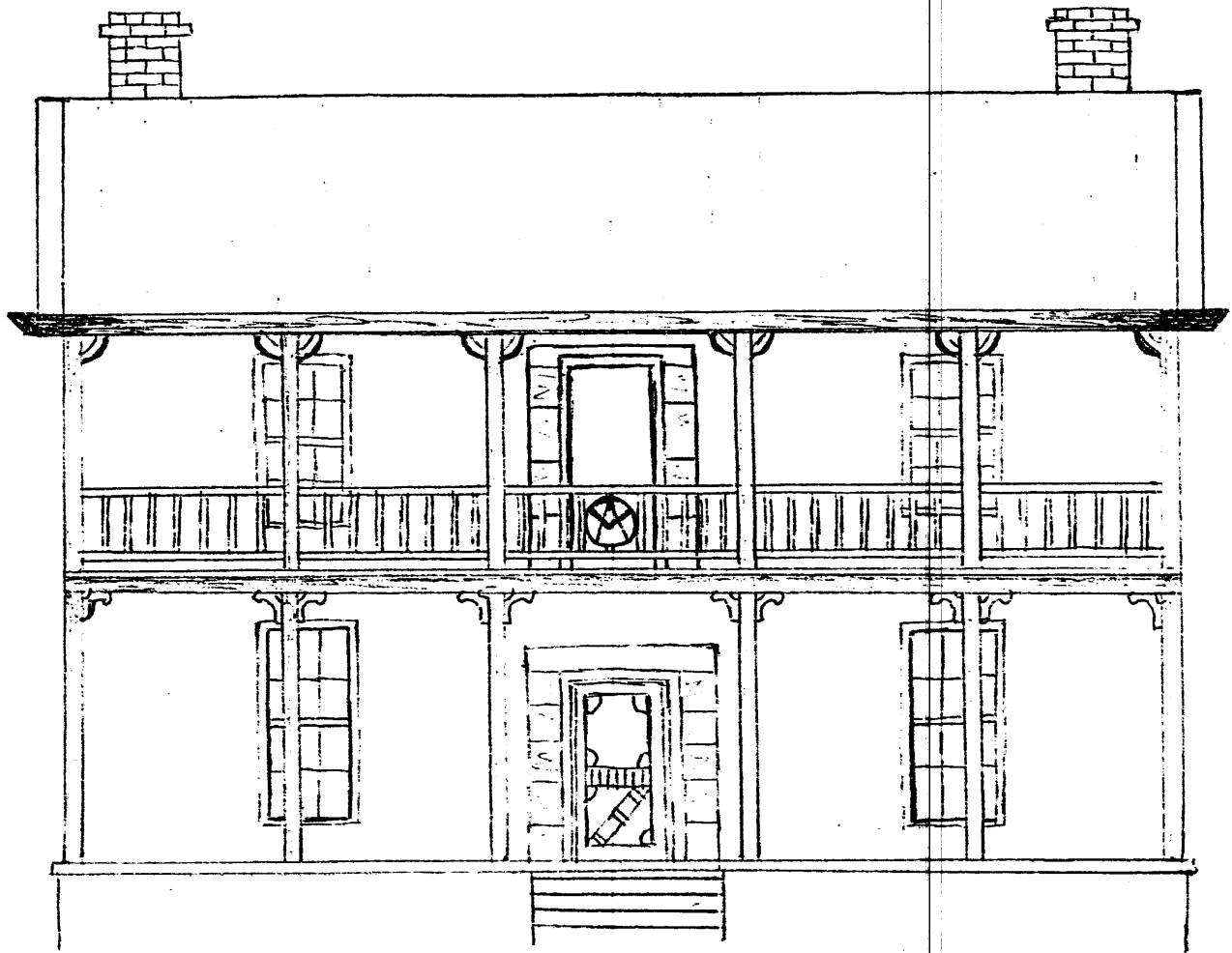
The floors and porches of the house was of white Oak. In 1937 the original floors were still in good shape. Not one piece had been replaced, even on the porches. This feature was noted with pride by the Loars.

There was a full sized basement under the house. It was told that watermelons and strawberries were grown in the basement, to ripen by Thanksgiving Day.

They were grown in large wood barrels. That is, sections of the barrels had large holes bored through and the plants grew from these holes. The barrels were set in the sunlight coming through the opened basement windows.

Built into the center of the balustrade of the top porch was a wooden Masonic emblem.

Why? And what would it have meant/?



The original house that Stephen Loar 1840-1900, built at Betsy Layne was a huge two story building. The house faced west, southwest. Sometime around 1913 or 1914 the house was "cut down" to one story. A large black walnut tree on down river side of house, fell on the house during a summer wind storm, smashing it in so badly that the family decided to remodel.

A picture was found in 1977 among papers of Stephen Loar 1894-1975, of the original home place at Betsy Layne. The front porch ran the full width of the house and there was the same type porch on the second floor. The second floor porch had a balustrade while the first floor porch did not. There was intricate woodwork at tops of porch columns on both first and second floor and the doors. The building had a metal roof.

The siding on the house was vertical, which might indicate the house was built "box" fashion. But it wasn't. The skeleton of the house was much the same as houses of today. That is the timbers were on sixteen inch centers. Except for flooring, most lumber in the house was yellow poplar. This writer saw in 1937 when remodeling work was being done in the kitchen.

It was told in 1935 that the bricks for the fireplaces and chimneys was made from clay taken from the ground in Loar hollow. The bricks were somewhat larger than modern day bricks.

Memory cannot recall the first name of the Loar from somewhere around Louisa that worked for Stephen in the logging operation. When I was a small child there was some talk of this Loar. He being a giant of a man, but a lamb in mind. He wore red long johns and the other loggers were always kidding and playing tricks on him. He was a hard worker, gentle by nature and devout in his belief in God. The loggers respected him in that, but would sometimes lock him out the shack in the cold weather or hide his boots or clothing. One day they supposedly had harnessed horses to a wagon and when this Loar got up on the wagon seat and said giddy-up, the horses ran away. They said this Loar pulled the wagon to where the horses stopped and harnessed them up properly. This feat of strength perhaps, was what stopped the loggers from any more tricks on this Loar as they wondered what would happen if he became angry and grabbed hold one of them.

We of today cannot know if everything handed down to us by word is true. It was told that this Loar was not an educated person. Word says he talked and talked to Stephen about making a different bullet for his "hawg" rifle. So he and Stephen made a mold and cast some pointed bullets. They made a ramrod with one end hollowed so it would fit part way over the bullet to tamp into the barrel of the gun. It was said they achieved great accuracy. This Loar would have nothing to do with the new fangled cartridge guns. He died young, never married.

Stephen had a large one story house built near the family house and it became sleeping quarters for people traveling, as the wagon road passed near the family house. The U.S. Mail man from Prestonsburg and the one from Pikeville met, exchanged mail and spent the nights at Stephens house. Three nights a week. The Loars were never lonely for company and of course always had the latest news from the outside world. The people "staying over for the night" did not always pay for their room and board with money, as sometimes it was favored to accept some cloth or article useful to the homestead.

Stephen had the timber and made some kind of flat bottom vessel that was used by people coming through and buying livestock. They loaded the stock on this raft like vessel, tied them in some manner and floated down the Big Sandy River. Sometimes only a few miles, sometimes all the way to the Ohio River.

Stephen had a large kettle for boiling the drinking water. None of his family or workers had typhoid fever. It was the assignment of a young worker to fill this kettle from the open Well, build the fire and boil the water.

Stephen had a Well drilled and got salt water. This large kettle was also used to boil the salt water to make salt. It was not told if the Well was drilled with intention of finding salt water. It was drilled by leg power of man, with the heavy metal drill bit, in an up and down motion.

This salt water Well was about two hundred feet south of the homestead, family house.

And so years later the house that W.T.Loar built had this Well on the back-side of the house, which Stephens family lived in 1935 till 1940. The Well and the Old Mill Stones of the grist Mill are now under twenty five feet of Road U.S.23.

Stephen (1840-1900) was very patient, listened more than he talked and strict about planned activities. He insisted that house and children be clean. He was about five foot eleven inches tall, thin, blue eyes, fair complexion and dark hair. He died of locked bowels.

Stephen Girard Loar 1840-1900

Stephen was the second son born to Peter Loar 2. (1814-1870) Stephen was born 3-1-1840 in Platte County Missouri, died at Betsy Layne Ky., I-22-1900. He married Belvador Honaker, born 2-19-1845, died I-16-1933, both buried in Loar Cemetery at Betsy Layne.

As always the question about people of those years, it is wondered how and where this Stephen got his education. We do not have that information but we do know he was an able person. He was a civil engineer among other capabilities. His surveying of many land sites have stood the many years, one having surveyed the land he bought at Betsy Layne. There was several hundred acres and the boundaries were not listed and marked as was custom of from creek to boulder to tree. Definate markers were established.

Stephen was in the civil war, Kentucky 10th Cavalry Co., A, Confederacy, at what rank I have never known. At one time he was captured (Love Hill) Morristown Tenn, but escaped. Some months later he was again captured and imprisoned at ~~Waysville Ky~~, about three months before end of war. He was in the battle at (Piedmont (now W.Va) when his cousin James (Lt) Anderson was killed.

MARYVILLE, TENN.

Some years after the war ended, Stephen was standing at the front gate of the house at Betsy Layne talking to the young son of Lindsey Layne. Stephen never told what it was about, but this young Layne cut Stephen across the stomach with a pocket knife. It was serious enough to lay Stephen up for two months. Later Lindsey brought his son to Stephens house and had the son apologize. Lindsey saying the war was over and everything forgotten as every man had his own right to think and live as he wished. Apparently some members of Stephens family was present to have passed those words on to descendents. Lindsey was a Captain in the Confederacy. Some people in the family thought the young Layne had cut Stephen because Stephen had a choice of serving under Lindsey but elected otherwise. Lindsey was the brother of Stephens wifes Mother. In 1923 I sometimes went to school with my cousin at Betsy Layne and this Layne that had cut my Great Grandfather was the school teacher. He was very thin and about six feet six inches tall. Years later, 1936 we boys played a cruel prank on this man. Up to a certain point it was humorous.

Stephen had also acquired several hundred acres of land at what is now Ivel Ky. Most of this land was high bottom land. Later Stephen gave his oldest son W.T.Loar most of this land. It might be evident, due to W.Ts. moving around, that the land brought a tidy sum of money when W.T. sold it.

With the exception of W.T.Loar, Stephen put all his children into good schools. The youngest son, Peter Andrew Loar, becoming a doctor.

Stephen was an inventor of sorts, improving on the farm tools and wagon construction. He devised a method of getting water from the creek to the wash and bath house via a bucket on a rope strung from the wash house and anchored in the cliff beyond the water hole. He built a mill, operated by water from the creek, and sometimes mule power, to grind grains grown on the farm. The Mill Stones having been those brought from the mountain near Elkhorn City by Jim Layne, Grandfater of Stephens wife. Stephen had a then so called neat hand at Civil Law. He represented people in cases many times. He was a Free and Accepted Mason, how far advanced I never knew.

When Stephen timbered the land at Betsy Layne, the loggers shack was located at the mouth of a small branch. Years later the Pike*Floyd Coal Company built their commissary on this spot. The site is now named Store House Hollow.

Come late fall of the first year Stephens family was at Betsy Layne, his Father took the family auto to Uncle Jim Loars place, and set it up on blocks of wood. He set big wood blocks under the axles so the tires would be about eight inches off the ground. Then he drained the water from the radiator and engine block. Most people around there did that with their cars, and the cars stayed up on those blocks all winter long.

In about two weeks Uncle Jim sent word to Stephens Father that the wheels had been stolen from the car. Stephens Father was furious. Uncle Jim was angry. Most all the Loars was upset. But in about a week they found that Shorty Lackey of Tram had taken the wheels.

Shorty worked at the coal mines and was a great grandson of George Lackey. George having been the slave of great Grandfather Stephen Loar. So when Shorty came by, on his way home, he was confronted with the information that he had stolen the wheels. Most of the time Shorty walked the railroad tracks to and from work. Well he admitted right away that he had taken the wheels. Shorty didnt own a car. He said he would bring the wheels back, Sunday morning.

When Shorty stole the wheels, he had poled a boat from Tram, upriver to Betsy Layne. He had to make two trips from the car to the boat with the wheels. Then of course he just drifted with the river current back to Tram. He lived on land that had been given to his great Grandfather by Stephen Loar.

Shorty told just how he stole the tires as he put them back on the car. After all the wheels was back on the car, he and Uncle Jim, Stephen and Stephens Father sat on the porch a long time, talking. The car made it through the winter without further harm.

When the Loars found that it was Shorty that had stolen the wheels, they thought it to be the funniest thing they had ever heard.

Stephen had not come up with a blank, in his observations of the Loar.

He had found them to have a wonderful sense of humor. Sometimes he couldnt figure out why something that had occurred was so humorous to a Loar. Such as, if a man got a foot run over by a wagon wheel, that was humorous. If the foot was hurt so badly that the man was to lose a few days work, then it wasnt funny. If a pocket knife was lost, it wasnt funny. If a cow was lost, that was funny.

Stephen found that the Loars were kind of distant. That is they never engaged in a confidential conversation. Absolutely not, with a non family person. They never talked Religion or Politics.

Other than going to Church, they rarely attended social functions.

When for some cause, they disapproved of some person, they said nothing to anyone except that person. Never went "out their way" to tell this person of their opinion, but when in time came face to face with the person, spoke their piece. Stephen was present on a couple of those occasions and it frightened him. Stephen found also that these Loars put a big matter of opinion on themselves, in how a person conducted themselves in their presence. Such as when a person came to their house on a wet day. If that person seemed to take pains to scrape the mud from their shoes on the door mats, it didnt make any difference if they after all tracked mud into the house. One told Stephen that it was a feeling of respect from that person to the Loar.