Henry Clayton Looney

Families

Posted by: Jack Nida

Posted on : 2005/8/27 6:00:00

HENRY CLAYTON LOONEY (1880 - 1957)

Henry C. Looney was born November 5, 1880, on a farm at Henry's Fork located three miles above Tariff, Roane County, West Virginia. He was the second of seven children born to Presley R. and Charity (McGlothlin) Looney, two pioneer families of Roane County. The Looney family has been traced to Henry's third great-grandfather, Robert Looney, who came to America with his family in the early 1700's from the Isle of Mann located in the Irish Sea.

His second great-grandfather was John Looney, born in 1732 on the Isle of Mann, and married Esther "Hettie" Renfro in Botetourt County, Virginia in 1756 after the family had moved westward from the Philadelphia area and down the Shenandoah Valley. It is said that John and Hettie had fourteen children before his death about 1817 in Botetourt County.

Henry's great-grandfather was Robert Looney who was born February 22, 1786, in Botetourt County, Virginia. Robert married Catharine Stover on December 9, 1809 in Botetourt County and to this union eight children were born. About the year 1818, Robert moved his family to Russell County, Virginia where they purchased land and remained in the area which is probably near the present town of Grundy in Buchanan County. In 1832, Robert moved his family in a dugout canoe or boat, which was some fifty one feet long, to the area on Poca River that is now known as Looneyville, West Virginia. Here he remained until his death in 1870.

Peter C. Looney was the grandfather of Henry and was born March 28, 1823, in Tazewell County, Virginia. On February 22, 1844, he married Charity Vineyard and they made their home on the head of Canoe Run, a branch of Henry's Fork of Big Sandy Creek in Smithfield district. Twelve children were born to Peter and Charity including Presley R. Looney, father of Henry.

Presley R. Looney was born April 22, 1852 and was married on December 28, 1876 to Charity McGlothlin. Seven children were born to this marriage including Henry Clayton Looney. Presley and Charity lived their entire lives on Henry's Fork near Tariff where they raised their family on a large farm. This area would later become one of the better oil producing territories in West Virginia. Charity died January 21, 1918 and Presley died October 11, 1936.

Henry Clayton Looney attended free school at the Brush Run School and at the Canoe School. He went to work in a general store and post office at the age of sixteen where he worked for more than two years. He also traveled by horseback and canvassed books throughout the area. When he was twenty-one years of age, he attended Spencer Normal School in Spencer, West Virginia for two years. He took the last County Teachers' Examination and the first Teachers' Uniform Examination and was granted a second grade Elementary Certificate. He then taught two terms of school on

Blown Timber near Newton in 1902 and 1903.

The rural community of Newton was first settled in 1833 and was known as the "three forks of Sandy". It was the principal town in Geary District and was laid out by J. D. McConahay. This area was well known to the scouting parties from Virginia who passed through the Greenbrier, across the Elk at the mouth of Big Otter, through the head of Sandy to the west fork of the Little Kanawha where Arnoldsburg is now located, thence westward along the old Indian trail to the town of California (that was later changed to Spencer), and continuing west to Sand Creek and the Ohio River at the present town of Ravenswood. Early settlers included William King and William Noe. Other early family names were Ross, Keen, Ogden, Rogers and Ellis. It was a prosperous farming area that established the Newton Post Office on February 26, 1857. The County of Roane was erected on the 11th day of March, 1856, from parts of Jackson, Gilmer and Kanawha Counties. The original post office location was in the residence of Rev. Davidson W. Ross, justice of the peace at the mouth of Dog Creek, who had suggested the name for his son, Isaac Newton, who was two years old. It was later moved to the "three forks of Sandy" where it has remained as the center of the town of Newton. A mill that included the latest in equipment for the grinding of wheat flour was established there about 1893.

At the close of Mr. Looney's second term of school, he purchased a general store at Newton. Within this building was also housed the Post Office which he operated for seven and one half years before it was moved to a new location and a new postmaster appointed.

On August 14, 1904, he was married to Clara M. Hoff at the home of her father at Left Hand, West Virginia. The letter for their marriage application reads, "Newton, W.Va. 1904, Mr. A. W. Summers, clk., Dear Sir - Enclosed you will find ck for $1.00 for which you will please send license to wed for Mr. Henry C. Looney, age 23 yrs. and Miss Clara M. Hoff, age 22 yrs., both of Newton, W. Va. Please send to Newton, W. Va. - and oblige". To this union was born one daughter, Ruby Gladys Looney, and three sons, Hubert, Darwin, and Gerald Looney.

Mr. Looney continued as one of the leading merchants at Newton for twenty five years. On June 11, 1922, a cloudburst at the heads of the right and middle forks of Sandy caused damage estimated at several thousands of dollars in this thriving community. A large building, which was owned by the Independent Order of Odd Fellows and housed the large general store owned by Mr. Looney, was washed off its' foundation and down stream where it lodged against the bridge. The store was almost a total loss and several teams of horses and oxen were used to remove the building. Mr. Looney immediately erected a store building on his own property and continued in business for several years after which he was appointed postmaster, a position he held for eight years. He also owned an electric shoe repair shop in the building adjacent to his home and worked there for several years. In 1942 and 1943, Mr. Looney worked as a postal clerk in the office at Left Hand, West Virginia and then later in the same capacity at the Newton Post Office.

On June 17, 1953, history repeated itself in the form of another cloudburst in the same region. Damage again was in the thousands of dollars as three stores and many homes in Newton were consumed in the flood waters. One elderly woman was drowned in the swift water with many others barely escaping with their lives. Newton continues to thrive as a farming and stock raising community and is now accessible from Interstate 79 at Wallback.

I remember my grandfather, Henry C. Looney, as a kind, generous and loving man. He was always a hard working person who maintained a large garden each year. He also kept a cow, some pigs and chickens on his small farm. A large grape arbor was adjacent to the cellar. They had a large two story house that I can remember exploring for unknown treasures throughout the trunks in many bedrooms. I was quite pleased that I was the only one who he entrusted with the combination to his large safe and I guarded it with utmost secrecy. He taught me to replace soles and heels on shoes and to sew leather on his electric sewing machines.

It never once occurred to me that my grandfather was handicapped in any way although he was born with two club feet and walked on his heels all of his life. As their only grandchild for many years, I received a lot of love and attention when I visited my Grandma and Grandpa Looney. Grandma always prepared delicious meals and my favorite was her black walnut and her applesauce cakes. Their home was heated with natural gas that was plentiful in the area and my grandfather purchased or traded for the oil and gas rights of several properties in southeastern Roane County which produced additional income for his family.

Grandpa loved to travel and visit people and places across the United States. He often took trips with one of his children after they were married and had traveled to the west coast in his later years. Grandma did not like to travel so she would stay at home and embroider or piece quilts until he returned.

It was a sad day indeed when my grandfather passed away with cancer on April 29, 1957. He was a member of the Newton Baptist Church, of the I.O.O.F. at Newton and a lifelong Democrat. He and my grandmother are buried at Clover Cemetery in Roane County.

Copyright ? by Jack Nida - 1995