

Traveling Around Old Monteagle By Telephone

(Part I)

Written by Jackie Layne Partin (2007-08)

Alex Benson “Dude” Layne is my uncle; he was born in 1929 at his parents’ home on 1st Street in Monteagle, Tennessee. The old homeplace, a two-story brown house, stood across the road from the old Monteagle Church of Christ building which later was remodeled by Pascal Barnes and became the James Sampley home. When Dude was a young boy, Mr. Charlie Mankin who was a member of that church paid him ten cents a week to clean both inside and outside of the meeting house. Dude’s parents were Arthur “Alex”ander Layne and Emma Rose King Layne. His siblings were Wilhelmenia, Cleveland, Bonnie Rowen, Artie Mae, Mary Rebecca and Patricia Ann. Dude, which is what we all call him, loves Monteagle and remembers the many good things about his life there. Living so far away in Arizona and not being healthy enough to come back to the mountain makes his heart grow fonder. He soaked up so much of the town life in his young years that he can talk for hours/days about what this little village meant to him as a young person. There were some sad trying times in his youth, but he likes to remember the good, happy times as much as possible. He has spent countless hours telling me stories and memories of his beloved home. I want to try to share some of these with you, and hopefully, I can get them somewhat accurate for the future ones who may want to know more about their little town. As these long telephone conversations between Arizona and Tennessee come about, time is allowed for him to relate his memory; then I add what I remember about the same place or situation. I admit that his memory is far better than mine.



**Alex and Emma Layne Homeplace on 1st St;
Torn down in 1963 (painting by Jackie from
memory)**



**Old Monteagle Church of Christ in background;
Wilhelmenia and Cleveland Layne in front (ca. 1928)**

For whatever reason, when he and I start one of our long anticipated journeys throughout Monteagle, we generally start at his “Grandma King’s” house. Dude did not know his grandpa Alex Benson King since he died June 20, 1912 at the age of thirty-seven. A. B. King ran a small general merchandise store in Monteagle, and it seems that on June 10, 1912 he made his last business transaction when he wrote a

check to the Tracy City Bottling Co. for “pop.” Ten days later he had died after an operation for a ruptured appendix. Drs. Bryan and Hayes had performed the surgery on the dining table in the King family kitchen. His death left his wife Mary with five children and another on the way. This is why the little house was called Grandma King’s house since the grandchildren never knew their grandpa. Dude well remembers his grandma, Mary Thelia Perry King. Her homeplace on the southeastern corner of First and King Street seemed to be where all the cousins and friends met to begin their daily romps through the paths, woods, roads and village of Monteagle. The house is no longer there and a vacant lot sits with all its hidden memories.



**Alex Benson and Mary Thelia King
with daughters Emma Rose and Della
(ca. 1900)**



**Artie, Cleveland and Bonnie Layne
In front: Mary Francis Wooten
(a cousin) in Grandma King’s
yard on King St.**



This check was the last known business transaction of A. B. King. It was signed on the back by K. Bonholzer.

STATEMENT.
 Tracy City Aug 1st 1912
 Mr. Virgie Holcomb, Admin
 Mr. King Monteagle.
 In Account With Doctors Bryant & Hayes
 For Surgical attention \$ 150.00
 Kindly pay half of the above
 to Dr. Bryant & send me
 check for the remaining \$75.00

\$75.00 Aug. 30, 1912 190
 Received from Mrs. Mary T. King
 twenty-five and 75/100 Dollars
 in full of services rendered
 A. B. King, deceased.
 David W. Bryant

The doctors' bill sent to A. B. King's widow on Aug. 30, 1912

Transcription of the document is as follows: “ Tracy City, Aug. 01, 1912; Mr. Virgie Holcomb, Admin(istrator for) Mr. King, Monteagle, In Account with Drs. Bryant and Hayes; For surgical attention--\$150.00—Kindly pay half of the above to Dr. Bryant and send me check for the remaining \$75.00; (this receipt was attached with a rusty straight pin) \$75.00, Aug. 30, 1912, Received from Mrs. Mary T. King

seventy-five and no/100 dollars in full of services rendered A. B. King, deceased (signed) David H. Bryan.”

I’ve inserted the above document to help with some of Monteagle’s history. Dude says that his mother Emma, then sixteen, was sent with a lantern to get Dr. Bryan to come to the family home. He at one time lived down and over the railroad tracks behind the Methodist Church building next door to the Robert Francis family. This above statement implies that the two doctors worked together in the communities around Monteagle and Tracy City. Dr. Bryan and his first wife Fannie are buried in the Monteagle Cemetery. Just for those interested in Civil War history, Fannie was one of the daughters of the infamous Calvin Brixey who terrorized the citizens around the mountain and valley and was later hanged probably near Manchester, TN.

STATEMENT

Monteagle, Tenn., July 1, 1912. 191

M. W. O. W. W. GREEN, CLY.

IN ACCOUNT WITH

J. T. BRANNAN,
UNDERTAKER AND DEALER IN FURNITURE,
Organs, Pianos, Sewing Machines, Stoves, Etc.
Watches, Jewelry, Etc.

To Casket	\$36.00
" Dress	12.00
" Sale of Underwear & Hoes	.25
" Hearse & my Services	00.00
	\$40.25

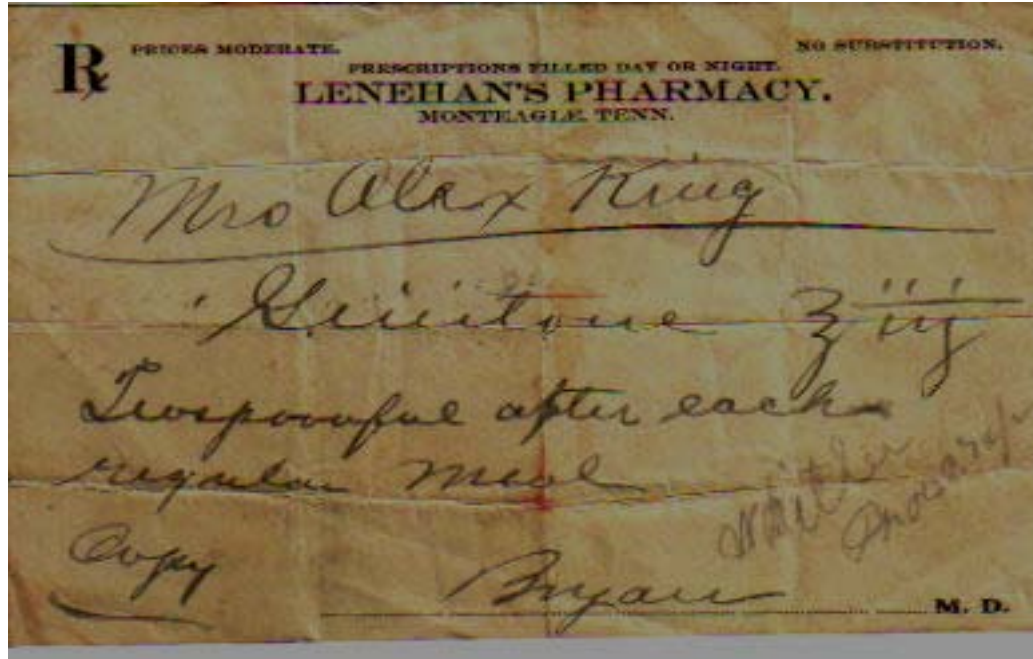
The above was for the Burial of Mr. Alex King

Rec'd of Mrs. O. J. Williams
in full of the charge of
this Aug 30 1912
J. T. Brannan

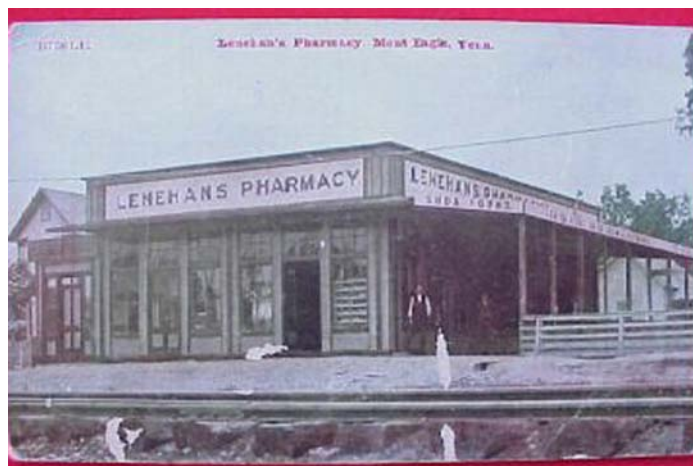
This documents shows the cost of Alex Benson King’s funeral.

J. T. Brannan was a big part of the early history of Monteagle. Dude and I both can remember him. One of his old homeplaces stood across the street and down the road a few yards from the house where Dude grew up. Later he and his son Herbert lived behind the Jim Francis Grocery Store in the house now owned by Ron Crabtree. Mr. Brannan was “into everything” businesswise as seen by the above document.

One thing not mentioned above was his real estate dealings. I will transcribe the funeral expenses for those who may not be able to read the statement which was sent to Grandma King on July 01, 1912. “Casket--\$35; Dress--\$12.50; Suit of Underwear and Hoes (*his spelling*)--\$.85; Hearse and my services--\$00.00-----(*total*)--\$48.25—The above Was for the Burial of Mr. Alex King—Re’c’d of Mr. V. I. Holcombe in full of the above a/c This Aug. 30, 1912---(*signed*) J. T. Brannan”. Mr. Brannan had the name as being a hard man, but folks, look at his math on this document! The total should have been \$48.35: he saved Grandma King ten cents—whether on purpose or not we will never know.



This is a prescription for Grandma King written by Dr. Bryan. Notice the name of the pharmacy—Lenehans Pharmacy.



Lenehans Pharmacy on College St. in Montevalle (notice the RR tracks in front)

The Lenehan's Pharmacy was one of several businesses that operated out of the building known to Dude and me as Lacy's Drugstore. The house on the left of the photograph would have sat where Polly and Ward Lacy's home was built and probably belonged to Ward's parents. Back to the prescription, we wish we knew the correct spelling of the medication, so that we could understand what ailed Grandma King. Maybe the loss of one's husband at a young age, having five young children, being pregnant with another, getting a bill for \$150.00 (*in 1912*) for an unsuccessful surgery and then the funeral costs may have caused her ailments. We may be out of touch with 1912 prices, but we can't help wonder if the cost of the doctors and funeral services were as high as they were because all involved were aware of Alex Benson King's insurance policy with the Woodmen of the World. There is absolutely no way that Grandma King could have paid that bill if she had worked day and night the rest of her life—not and rear her children.

After all the discussions about "family matters" as the above involves, then Dude and I start our verbal journey with the telephone as our vehicle. Up the road on King Street toward town lived Jennie Warren (*Hall*). Her homeplace later was owned by Fred and Ruby Kennedy. It was always kept in immaculate condition. At one time Mr. Kennedy had dammed up the branch that came across his yard and meandered off behind Grandma King's and Silas Gregory's houses on its way toward the Monteagle Assembly grounds. Goldfish had been added to the little pool which formed on the property. I drove passed the Kennedy lot lately and stopped to try to visualize the little fish pond, but the mounds of sand, concrete and rubble made it difficult—what a sad thing to happen to that little corner of Monteagle! For years there was an empty lot on the corner above the Kennedys' house during Dude's childhood and mine, but he was told that some of the Mankin families had a livery stable there at one time—*probably the Brown, John and Charlie Mankin families*. It



One of the old barns which stood on the SE corner of King and College Sts. was used as a livery stable probably by the Mankin families and also used as a blacksmith shop by Sam Gregory who is one of the men in the photograph. (Photo from Roberta Gregory)

also came to our attention that Sam Gregory, father of Silas, later used the old barns for a blacksmith shop or possibly in conjunction with the Mankin livery stable works. Some can remember that an old horseshoe was placed in the cement sidewalk in front of that area. Dude and I both have walked over that old horseshoe in past years. After the old barns disappeared the corner lot was always vacant and well kept until Greeters acquired the land.

Later, on the same lot or very near, going toward town was a café/beer hall owned and operated by Ed Hall. James Ed and Jennie Hall were the grandparents of Clara Cannon Shoemate who became a well-known restaurateur in and around Monteagle. Clara's mother Tera Hall Cannon died when she was very young with complications of child birth with her stillborn daughter Tera (II). Clara and her husband Tommy Shoemate lived at one time in the house with Ed and Jennie Hall. For years my mother Clara Meeks Layne had a photo of a small log cabin in her "picture box." On the porch of that cabin was an old lady holding a baby. My mother always told me that the cabin was one of those at Clara's place that stood on the spot of the VFW building now on Highway 41. The old lady was "Granny Hall," and the baby was me. I grew up having an affinity with this old lady, but until recent years I couldn't really get a handle on who she was. Evidently she was Clara's grandmother Jennie. My mother worked for Clara Shoemate several years. Before, during and after the WWII years, my father and other soldiers frequented Ed Hall's Cafe until it burned.



Edd's Café owned by Edward and Jennie Hall; their granddaughter Clara Cannon started out as a waitress here.

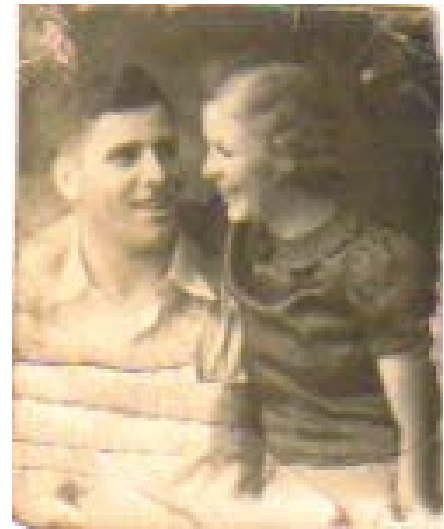
It was around 1930 at this little restaurant that Clara Hall started serving hamburgers and short orders which prepared her for the wonderful years ahead in the restaurant business. Soon Ladue Holiday built his Cumberland Funeral Home near where the beer hall stood. Of course today in 2008, John William Greeter's business envelopes

the old funeral home, the morgue and apartment area, the Fred Kennedy place and the vacant corner lot. Actually, it has again changed hands and has a new owner now in 2008.

Dude rarely speaks of Clara Shoemate that he doesn't have a story about her "business on the side of the mountain" as we always called it. His sister Wilhelmenia managed that restaurant for Clara, and that is where she met her husband Chester "Moon" Mullins. It was a favorite weekend gathering place for the soldiers from Camp Forrest near Tullahoma. On one occasion Wilhelmenia had gone to one of the little cabins to sleep and her brother, Cleveland, unable to wake her, went inside and found her succumbed to carbon monoxide poisoning from one of the little heaters. We are thankful he was in time to save her life; she always was a wonderful person and a good laugh at a family gathering. The restaurant was remembered mostly for the party atmosphere on Saturday nights, but it could also serve up good old-fashioned country cooking. I know this because my mother was one of the cooks. She said those were the days when the chickens were killed and plucked on the spot, and the potatoes were peeled and cooked fresh. I've been told many times that my mother could make a pot of pinto beans taste like T-bone steak, and Dude who had eaten many meals at Mama's house agrees.



Clara's Restaurant and Court on Hwy 41 below Mont-eagle. A favorite hangout for WWII soldiers from Camp Forrest. (photo taken in 1940's)



Tommy and Clara Hall Shoemate

Going back to our College Street discussion, before the Cumberland Funeral Home was built, Dude remembers two large white two-story houses that stood just past the Ed Hall beer joint. The first of these is believed to have been the James and Myrtle Gossett house which burned around 1946/7. Helen Wooten Sells remembers being in the fourth grade at school across the tracks and watching the house burn from her classroom window. A grandson of Jim Gossett, Jimmy Ray Sampley,

remembers playing on the balcony of the large house. He said that his grandfather had just filled the little coalhouse seen in the background with coal. After the fire, the coal burned for days and days. The other house may have been the Cantrell house that probably belonged to J. C. Cantrell who had a furniture store in the building next to the house. There was a rock fence in front of this house. Most people agree that the two houses burned together since they were so close. Dude recalls that Clyde and Ruth Bennett and their son Clyde, Jr. lived in one of those houses at one time. Clyde, Jr. suffered severe eye damage when a child accidentally shot an arrow into his eye. At times, different people rented rooms in one or both of the houses.



Mrs. J. C. Cantrell in front of her store next to Eagle Theater in Monteagle



The Wallace House later became the Jim Gossett homeplace. L to R: Beulah Mae Gossett, Herbert Brannan, Edith and Jim Gossett

Neither Dude nor I know when the sidewalks were laid in town, but they have been there all my life. Lenora Johnson Layne remembers walking on the sidewalks right in front of the Gossett house, so that would be before mid 1940's. I remember as a child that I had to step high to get up on the sidewalk which was so worn and crumbly at the corner of King and College Sts. The embedded horseshoe makes me believe that they were laid many, many years before the 1940's.

As a young boy, Dude and his cousins walked the railroad tracks to Tracy City to see the movies at the Dixie Theater. Since he was born in 1929, he figures that the Eagle Theater in Monteagle wasn't built until the forties because there was no way that he would have walked to Tracy City to see a movie had there been a theater in Monteagle. Before the theater was built, the next building after the two white houses was a large two-story house called "Corner Oaks" which had a balcony. It had been a boarding house, but he distinctly remembers that Garnett King and his family lived there at one time. Garnett was one of the children of Samuel and Nannie King. He was a mechanic. The story Dude likes to tell with mischief in his voice is when his great-grandma Sarah Catherine Perry King walked up the worn path (*which meandered between the Fred Kennedy place and the Alexander house*) with her knitting basket to sit and visit with the King family. Sarah Catherine dressed in her

long dress bent over in the yard, and Dude says, “Garnett’s old goat charged Great-grandma King and took her for a ride.” The thing I remember about the path is the day that a neighborhood boy accidentally (*or maybe otherwise*) shot my brother David with a BB pellet. We were sorta forbidden to go on that path anymore. Dude remembers the day when J. T. Brannan shot and killed Constable Pete Norwood in front of the City Café but on the Grundy County side of the railroad tracks. It was this path that Mr. Brannan traveled to get to his home before the law came. Dude watched from his perch in Grandma King’s apple tree. These wonderful very worn paths were all over Monteagle in those days. After Corner Oaks was gone, and some time after the Eagle Theater was built, Clyde Bennett had a garage on that corner; at some point the buses used this building as a stopping point on the mountain. That building now is used by the Monteagle fire and police departments.



Dude’s Great grandma Sarah Catherine Perry King and her niece Lizzie Perry Creighton (Lizzie is Tom Creighton’s mom.)



Moving the old depot to the Monteagle Hotel ca. 1944: small child is Alice Wooten Elliott

Crossing Central Avenue and looking North along the eastern fence of the Monteagle Hotel property was a long white building which Dude remembers as having no windows. That was where the hotel employees boarded down at night. Stories go that years before, the black servants were housed there, and someone tried to blow up the building but failed. Around the mid-forties the old depot was moved along College Street and attached to the Monteagle Hotel. Benjamin A. “Pap” Wooten and his granddaughter Alice Wooten were among the curious spectators that day. It became a place for the Greyhound buses to stop. One source thought the move was made around 1947, but Dude says that he remembers that the soldiers who came home from WWII got off the buses at the Monteagle Hotel bus stop. So maybe it was moved a few years earlier.

The first picture below was taken in January 1946 in front of the Hotel eagle. Oliver Charles Mabee had never seen his son Dale for the first time. No doubt, Oliver got off the bus at the old depot extension which probably makes Dude's thoughts more accurate on the date the depot was moved to its new site. The large eagle was a choice site for photographs until its mysterious disappearance. The spot was never the same afterwards.



Oliver Charles Mabee meets his son Dale for the first time at the eagle (Jan. 1946)
(Photo compliments of Dale Mabee)



L to R: Clarine, George and Helen Thomas at the eagle. (Photo submitted by Marlene Thomas)

Of course the most prominent building in town was the Montegale Hotel pictured above in the background. Many postcards, photographs and stories have come about because of this historical business. Dude reflects on the times when celebrities would be in town at the hotel and cross over to the City Café for good old-fashioned southern cooking. Fred and Ruby Kennedy were operators of this Café. In contrast, the hotel dining room was used for more sophisticated dining. The children would go about town announcing that if one wanted to see Uncle Dave Macon, or whoever the famous person in town was, go over to the City Café and be on the lookout. Many of the country music stars and other well-known individuals frequented our town on their way from Chicago to Miami and points between the two.

Behind the hotel was a rather large log house that served as an overflow from the hotel. Dude and I understood that that house had been moved from the old golf

course and was the original Francis House. According to Roberta Gregory Alexander, originally the house had a long sitting room area with six bedrooms along one side. Later the house was rented out to private families. The gardens, terraces and lawn were immaculately kept in the back of the hotel for the recreation of its customers. The last Monteagle Hotel burned in the early fifties and was never built back. I remember standing at our living room window watching the fire light up the sky and wanting so badly to go to town. I was young, but I sensed that the landscape of Monteagle had changed forever. Such was the dominance of that magnificent building.

Jim and Macy Francis served the town with a grocery store just passed the hotel. They also had a feed building attached, and the *then* post office was next to it. Why do certain things stay in our memories? We remember the old hardwood floor of the post office and the service provided when one “called” for his/her mail. The wide sidewalk area in front was a gathering place for the older gentlemen of the town. They all came to “call for the mail” and exchange stories. Dude’s father and my grandfather Alex Layne was one of those old gentlemen. We remember a small man named Sam Farmer and a larger one named Arch Baker. Mr. Baker always wore overalls and was the man one called when help was needed with a hive of bees or when a grave needed to be dug. As a child I remember a swarm of bees visiting our backyard. Mr. Baker came and showed us how to beat the bottom of a washtub to cause the bees to settle. When they did settle, he smoked the bees and assured the queen a place in a stand provided by my grandfather. In those days when a family member died, the family and friends dug the grave. Mr. Arch Baker was always there to help anyone who needed him. He lived on the Marion County side of town near the old Moffat house which became the home of Charlie and Katie Goforth Fults.

Sam Farmer lived over on the other side of the curve from Arch Baker’s house as the road turned back toward town on Central. On the backside of that curved road lived a lady named Aunt Lessie King Vail. She had a neat little slab house built for her by her husband Joe Vail. I remember Aunt Lessie well; she was one of those people who looked at your face hard and studied you like she would a book. Dude and I always found that in most photos with Aunt Lessie in them, she is always looking away. She wasn’t Dude’s aunt nor mine, but Dude says that it was a way of showing respect when one called older people Aunt and Uncle. Aunt Lessie was a story in herself. She smoked cigarettes which she so skillfully made herself. Usually the little tobacco bag was hung inside the dress with a safety pin. When the urge to smoke came about, she got one of her very thin cigarette papers, filled it with tobacco and rolled it in such a fashion that a real cigarette appeared—that’s how I remember it. She would lick the paper to make it stay together. For moments when she wanted to leave the world around her, she picked up her guitar and strummed her way into dreamland. Actually, she was a first cousin to Dude on her mother, Fannie Layne

King's side. I loved Aunt Lessie. Her little house disappeared when the interstate took that section of town.



Aunt Lessie Bell King Vail and her daughter Virginia King Long at their little house in Monteagle.



Aunt Lessie and her daughter Dorothy with her white geese.

Dude and I can remember seeing Sam Farmer leaning back in a straight chair on his small front porch as he watched the world go by. His little house was built by Floy and Carl Norwood; then Bonnie Rowen Layne bought it from them when they moved to California. Later Sam acquired it. The interstate later caused Sam to have to move to the Maple Hurst Hotel; his little house along with several others was torn down in the name of progress. According to Dude, Mr. Herbert Brannan was appointed to see to the care of Sam, and he arranged for Sam to “take” his meals nearby at the Diner. There were others in that little group of men at the post office whom I loved very much. Mr. Champion and Mr. Silas Custer, Sr. were two others. Oh, to be able to stand and hear the stories of the old days which were exchanged on

those cool, crisp mornings. My mama probably wouldn't have wanted me to hear them all, but I would listen today to every one of them if I could.



The Post Office Gang waiting to “call” for their mail at Monteagle

The next building was Marugg's New York Store. Martin Marugg was one of my husband's Swiss relatives. He had stores in Tracy City and Monteagle. The Post Office was in the back of this building before it moved next door to the Jim Francis complex as shown in the picture above. Dude and I remember this building better as Ward Lacy's Drugstore. Inside was a soda fountain. One could get ice cream and coke served up by David “Son” Adams as we remember. My family wasn't financially able to allow me many trips to the fountain. My grandfather, Dude's dad, would pay me to pick strawberries or raspberries, and that was how I was able to visit the fountain. On the way to the drugstore, I would pick blackberries on the hillside beside the Methodist parsonage which has long been gone; the lot stands vacant today. Mr. Allen Hardison, my freshman English teacher, lived in that house at that time. When I paid for my chocolate ice cream cone, I would stick my handful of berries into the ice cream and happily take off toward home.

On the corner before one entered into the Monteagle Assembly, Dude said that the George and Annie Partin family lived with their four children: Eloise, William, George and Kelly. I think the original owners of that compound were James and Ann Porter. James was a physician and maybe the postmaster also. The Old Post house got its name from being just that. Dude and I both remember Kelly Partin as being the “milkman.” He was the one who made that wonderful bottled pasteurized milk for Monteagle. In those days, milk was delivered by the Partins to the customers' front doors in glass bottles. Earlier we had a cow, and fresh milk was readily available. Before the Partin Dairy furnished milk, Charlie and Ella Mankin had a dairy on the SE corner of King and First Street. The cows were free to wander anywhere they wished. Each home had to fence the animals out in those days. Dude's Grandma King would set her clock daily when Charlie went out to gather up

his cows for milking—so precise was he. A small building at the back of the house was used for straining, storing and selling the milk. Buttermilk and butter were also available to the locals. The little milk house still stands at the back of the Johnny Brannan house. The Kelly Partin dairy eventually burned bringing about the move to outside milk companies.

The Monteagle Depot used to sit right in the area next to the Kelly Partin homeplace. That building was a hub of activity especially in the summer months when the Assembly patrons were arriving for their vacations. The train was used by locals who had no other means of travel. School students used it; locals needing to go to Chattanooga for supplies not available on the mountain used it. Before the 1920's there was no 41 Highway (*Dixie Highway*), so if one needed to go to Chattanooga, he did it by train via Cowan, Tennessee. Down the road from where the depot was, the Speegle brothers had a gas station, and next was Harvey Thomas' restaurant. Dude reminded me that Harvey and his wife Clarine operated several different restaurants in different parts of town at different times.



On the left, Harvey's Café was on the Marion County side of town. On the right, it was on the Grundy County side.

Along about the Assembly entrance, College Street ended for a short distance and then picked up again where the old Pelham road went off the mountain. There were several private homes and rental homes on what some locals called “Chinch Row.” When I was born my parents lived on Chinch Row, and yes, it got its name from the little bedbugs—“*Sleep tight; don't let the bedbugs bite.*” Many years ago if a young Monteagle family was not born with a silver spoon in its mouth, then it probably got its start at housekeeping on Chinch Row. The little houses were not the best in town, but the rent was affordable. When Dude, my mother, and several other family members worked at Clara's Restaurant on the side of the mountain, they had a path worn between the restaurant and the houses on Chinch Row. They had a small fence to cross, but as shifts changed at work, they would pass each other going to and from the little house for a night or day's sleep. I actually slept in a dresser drawer in one of

the little houses when I was born a newborn. Times were hard for many of the people in Monteagle. Chinch Row is gone the way of all the world—buried beneath tons of limestone.



Alex Benson “Dude” Layne



Arthur “Alex”ander Layne family; back L to R: Bonnie Rowen; Wilhelmenia ; Cleveland; Seated: Emma Rose holding Mary Rebecca; and Arthur Alexander; Front: Artie Mae and Alex Benson “Dude” (unborn Patsy)

Our telephone trips often bring us back to Grandma King’s house. It is not unusual for Dude and me to wander out into town, just to come right back where we started. We would like to recall more of our memories for you at a later date, and we will call it “Traveling Around Old Monteagle--Part II.” We both hope that you have enjoyed reading about our hometown and that you enjoy living there as much as we did. Please email any corrections or additions to jackiepartin@blomand.net or write to me at P. O. Box 295, Monteagle, TN, 37356.