A DYER CHILDHOOD

Carolyn Mason Tyree is the youngest and only surviving child of Willis H. Mason (usually called Will) and Sarah Sophronoa Barclay (usually called Fronia). She was born in 1904 in Dyer and lived there until about 1915. These are her reminiscences of her childhood in Dyer.

The Willis Mason family lived next to the Baptist Church, about a block from the school. Neighbors were Mr. and Mrs. Floyd Loomis who lived across the street and Mary Chitwood and her children who lived next door. The old Chitwood home is gone now; it was a two story house with a summer house in the yard. The yard was always full of flowers; a wedding was held in the summer house once. Roger Chitwood improvised a mail box and put it on the fence between the two yards. He and the Mason girls used to write notes to one another and place them in the "mail" box. There were Chitwood girls too: Viva, Delia and Pauline.

The school was housed in a two-story white frame building. On the top floor of the building the Lodges had their Lodge Hall where they met and the small room behind the large room was used to store the Lodge paraphernalia. The lower floor of two rooms and one room upstairs was where the children attended school and learned the Three "R".

Willis Mason was a member of the Lodge and his son, Raymond, had the job of sweeping out the Lodge facilities between meetings. Will Mason finally relented to his daughter Carolyn's frequent pleas to go to a meeting with him. She had heard that the new members had to ride a billy goat down the stairs and she wanted to witness that event for herself. The Lodge meeting was a big disappointment for her however because the billy goat rides were not on the agenda and she soon fell asleep.

The school had a large playground where the usual children's games were played. Carolyn's close school friends were Mary and Sybil Chastain and Velma Burrough. The school building is no longer standing.

Willis Mason owned a grocery store and later a business which he called a "confectionary". There was a soda fountain with tables and chairs; he offered ice cream, fountain drinks, and occasionally his own recipe of chili. Many staples and tobacco products were also sold. A unique sales item was fresh bread which came to Dyer by train from Fort Smith. Since there was no bakery in Dyer, this was a popular feature with Will Mason's customers.

The Mason store was located just South of the railroad tracks as Carolyn remembers. There was a vacant lot adjoining it. Will Mason agreed to set up a croquet court on the lot if the neighborhood boys would keep it mowed. The croquet games soon became a popular gathering place for the neighborhood young people.

Will Mason's business was never robbed to his daughter's recollection, but he kept a gun under the counter, just in case. Once when a group of Gypsies came to town, as they did periodically in those days; one or two of them walked behind the counter and Will pulled his gun on them. The Gypsies fled the store and never returned.

In 1913 Willis Mason married Hattie Hayes Mason, widow of his brother Lawrence. They had two sons, Hayes and Tom Mason, both deceased.

(I and Lorena recalls that when Gypsies entered the Community that the merchants quickly locked the doors to the stores to keep them from taking over, and once my father noticed a woman walking out with a sack of flour under her skirt while another woman was talking to him, but he caught her in time to get the sack of flour away from her.)

Travel around in Dyer back in 1910 was chiefly by horse and buggy. When the Mason family traveled to Franklin County to visit Will's brother, Mack Mason, they had to ride across Mulberry Creek because there was no bridge there at that time. On one occasion the Creek was so swollen by heavy rains that the water came up into the buggy and the horses had to swim across the creek.

The first automobile in Dyer which Carolyn can remember belonged to her Uncle John Wagoner who moved to town about 1914 from Henrietta, Oklahoma. Uncle John took his nieces for a ride in his new car which was a memorable experience for all.

The Train was the chief mode of transportation between Dyer and the outside world. Two passenger trains came through Dyer as well as freight trains. Almost all merchandise came by rail. In those days passengers could ride in the Caboose as well as in the coach cars.

There were several businesses in Dyer, a general store, hardware store, and an ice house among others. The ice was cut in blocks and covered with sawdust. Children would sometimes go after ice and pull it home in a wagon. Deliveries were also made to the home, a card was placed in the window or screen door to designate the amount of ice needed.

There was no theater in Dyer. Occasionally slide shows were presented by a traveling group. Usually the shows were at the school. There was musical accompaniment with the shows and sometimes a narrator to read the passages on the projected slides.

There were two Dyer physicians which Carolyn remembers: Dr Ayres and Dr. Haney. They probably had offices but usually they saw their patients on house calls. Dr. Ayres gave the Mason children their smallpox vaccinations. Carolyn does not know which doctor treated her mother during her final illness. Fronia Barclay Mason died in 1909 at the age of 35 leaving four children.

A popular route for hiking or riding was along the Old Wire Road. Another favorite jaunt was to hike to "the mountain" outside of Dyer. This was a good place to gather nuts. The Mason children also enjoyed visiting their grandparents, William M. and Priscilla Mason, who had a small farm just at the Western edge of town. A creek or branch ran through the farm in which the children swam or played. Grandma Mason would pack them a lunch in a little kettle with a lid so they could have a picnic. Once on such an outing one of the girls decided it would be fun to let the lunch kettle float downstream and guide it along with a stick, then pull it out when they were ready to eat. The game proved to be disastrous however, because the kettle got away from her and was swept away. That was the last time Grandma Mason fixed them a picnic lunch.

Willis Mason and his family moved to a farm between Dyer and Alma about 1915. While living there Carolyn attended Sixty-One school. Her teacher, Magnolia Meadors, later became her sister-in-law as Mrs. Raymond Mason. After a few months the Mason family moved to Alma.

Two of the Mason children, Raymond and Sue, remained in the Alma vicinity and raised families there. Sybil moved to Ozark after her marriage. Carolyn moved with her father to Foreman, Arkansas, and later to Kusa, Oklahoma, where she married Robert J. Tyree; shortly after their marriage they moved to Muskogee, Oklahoma.

Willis Mason, his wife Fronia, his parents William Mason and Priscilla Karnes Mason are all buried in the Dyer cemetery along with other family members. The house in Dyer in which Carolyn Mason Tyree was born is still standing.

Submitted by Mary Tyree Cheesman

Daughter of Carolyn Mason Tyree

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