



Lura at her 100th birthday celebration

But privacy was short lived when his parents and brother Tom moved back in as well as another brother, his wife and two children. This made twelve people living in a tight space plus a young teacher at White Rock School who was boarding with the family at the time. They divided up the small rooms downstairs and in the upstairs loft so everyone had their own, albeit tiny, spot.

Hercy owned and operated a sawmill, a grist mill and a country store on the river that was patronized by those living in the area. In 1933, Hercy began construction on a new home for his immediate family that was located behind his parent's cabin and they moved in, in 1934 when Lura was twelve years old. That is the lovely place that she and her sisters were raised and called home until they married.

Back then, young girls learned early in life how to piece and sew quilts. Lura learned the art of quilting from her mother and remembers helping her stitch at six years of age.

Lura Coffey Steele:

An Active Centurion

By Lynn Coffey

On a cold Christmas Eve morning in 1922, the small cry of a newborn girl was heard in a rustic cabin in the isolated mountain hamlet of White Rock, Virginia. That tiny cry announced that the second daughter of Hercy Franklin and Lora Burgess Ramsey Coffey had come into the world. Delivered by area midwife Nannie Coffey, the child's unusual name, Lura Myrtis, was picked by her father. Eleven months earlier, on January 11, 1921, Lura's older sister Marjorie Velma was born and the family was complete when the couple's third daughter, Lorine Alder, came on October 23, 1926.

Growing up in White Rock, the three Coffey sisters lived within a stone's throw of the Tye River which ran in front of their grandparent's log cabin where the family moved after Lorine was born. At the time, the cabin was vacant after Hercy's parents had moved Waynesboro.



Eli Coffey's cabin (Hercy's mill at right)



Parents, Hercy and Burgess



The house Hercy Coffey built at White Rock

By fourteen, she was designing and sewing quilts of her own. She has continued the art form throughout her life, hand-stitching the colorful and useful coverings for many members of her family. She, in turn, taught her daughter Ann the old-time craft and Ann then taught her own daughter Tonya, grandson Braden, and sister-in-law Carolyn the craft, making five generations of quilters in the same family. The bed in Lura's guest room is stacked high with finished quilts of every pattern and hue, and new ones stretched on a quilting frame are always in the making.



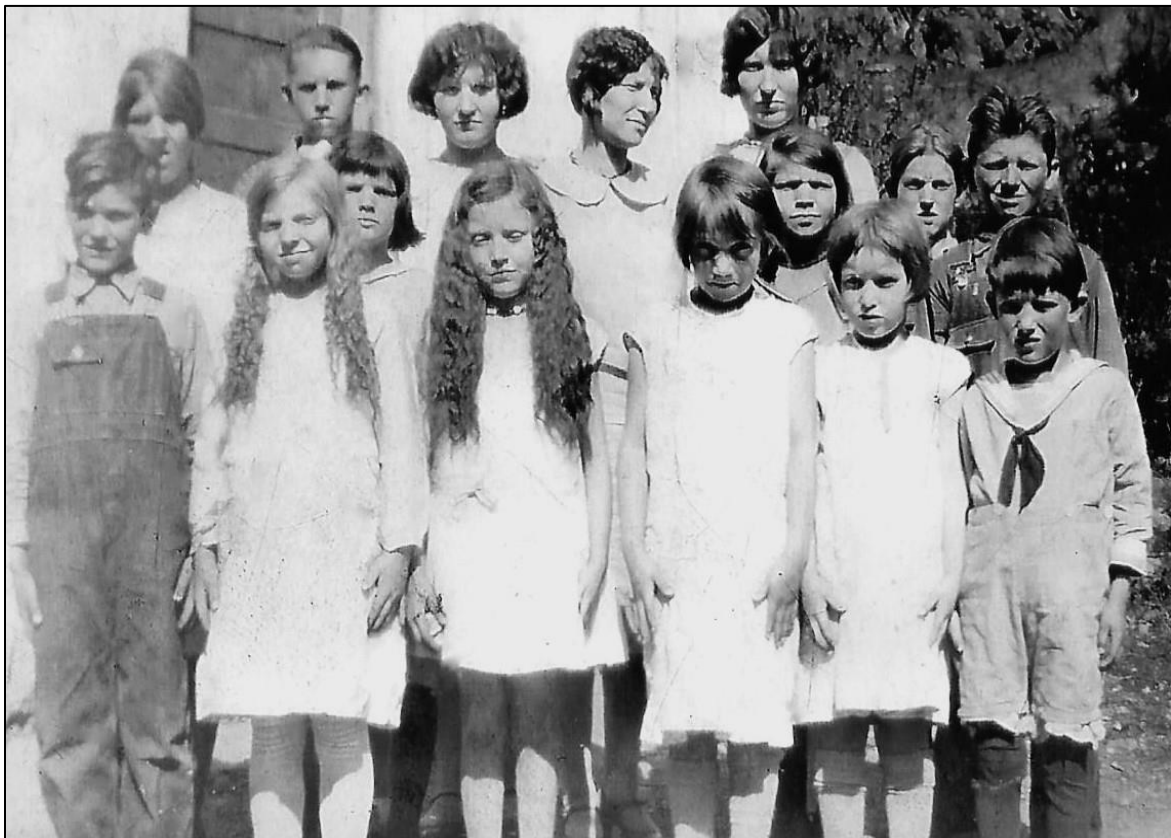
Lura showing one of her quilts in 2018



Lura's hardworking hands, 2023

Growing up, Lura did the standard chores around the house growing up and said as a child she helped her parents in the store, sawmill and grist mill. She remembers removing slabs of wood and sawdust and stacking finished lumber their father had cut at the mill. At a young age she waited on folks who came to their store to buy something. She said, "Coffee was five cents a pound, baking soda, two cents." They sold coffee beans in 50-pound bags which could be ground at the store or taken home and ground in individual grinders that most people kept in their kitchens. Hercy bought items from the Blue Ridge Wholesale Company in Lexington and brought them back to his store to sell. Everything from coffee, sugar, salt, baking powder and soda, candy, thread, canned goods and 100-pound sacks of all types of beans were purchased and resold at Coffey's Store in White Rock.

The girls could also grind people's corn at the grist mill when their parents were gone or doing something else. Lura recalled a family that came down from Meadow Mountain (Love) with enormous sacks of corn piled high on their mules. "It would take about a half a day to grind it all so the men would put the mules inside a little corral we kept for our cows until they were ready to leave." Talking with my husband, Billy, there was a good chance those men with the mules were his great uncles, Ellis and Royal Everitt, who lived in Chicken Holler and would have used the old connecting path from Squarmouth Rocks down to Hercy's mill. I, myself, remember Nin Coffey, who lived at the end of Chicken Holler, telling me that in her 20's she rode her horse down the steep mountain to the Coffey's grist mill with a 100-pound sack of corn to be ground slung over the saddle.



1930 White Rock School picture. Lura at 7 years, second right on bottom row



1940 White Rock School picture. Lura at age 17, sitting on the ground

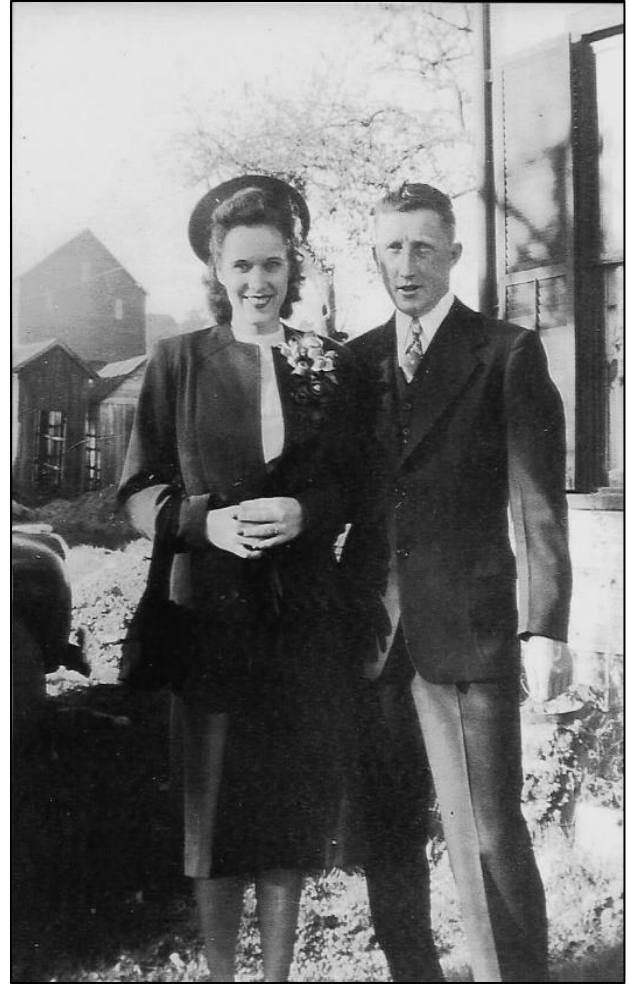
As a child, Lura attended the one-room schoolhouse in White Rock along with her two sisters. Unlike many of the other mountain kids, the walk to school was a short one; just across the river from their home. Remembering some of her early teachers, Lura said the first was a Shields girl. Then came Elva Coffey of Coffeytown, Robert Hill of Tyro, Ira Campbell, a Miss Jones from Massies Mill who taught for two years, and Hallie Cage from Keysville, who taught for about three years. Hallie, Lura recalled, boarded with the Marshall Fitzgerald family and the two men boarded with Lee Fitzgerald, both of which had large houses down the North Fork Road. Lura went to the required seven grades at White Rock and continued to attend school for several years afterward, "Because I liked to go and have a good time!"

I asked about dating and she reeled off a list of boy's names she casually went with. At that time, dating consisted of the boys coming to the house and just talking or making some music and singing together. She said on the weekends, it was nothing for their house to be filled with ten or more young people. Her cousin, Elwood Taylor, played the guitar and he came every evening after supper to play and sing. "Glenn Allen would also come to play music with Elwood and at the time he was sweet on my sister, Lorine, and Elwood was sweet on Glenn's sister Louise so that's all I heard about...Glenn and Louise, Glenn and Louise," laughed Lura.

"When my Aunt Lena moved to Steele's Tavern, I went to stay with her. I was about twenty-two at the time and I got a job at DuPont in Waynesboro where Lena was working.



Cousins: Elwood Taylor and Lura



Lura and Johnny's 1947 wedding day

There was a bus that took the people to DuPont each day and my aunt and I rode it together. About that time, I met Johnny Rush Steele when he returned home from the Army. His family was one of the founders of Steele's Tavern."

After a few years of courtship, the couple married on October 20, 1947 at Old Providence Presbyterian Church with Rev. Grier officiating. Their first child, Bobby, was born at Lexington Hospital on June 8, 1948. At that time, they were living upstairs in a large home in Steele's Tavern along with Glenn and Lorine who had married and set up housekeeping in the two upstairs rooms adjoining Lura and Johnny. By the time their daughter, Ann, was born in 1949, the couple had moved to the old Zink home near Mount Joy Church. In 1950 their third child, Bonnie was born. Sadly, Bonnie passed away from leukemia when she was just twenty-six years of age, leaving her husband, Harold Craig a widower at a very young age.

Lura said her husband drove a truck in the early years of their marriage and later got a job at the Celanese factory in Verona where they made all types of cloth, and then at the new Westinghouse plant, also based in Verona.

In 1951, the family moved to Spottwood in a home built around the 1870s and that's where the children were raised and called home. In the years following, Johnny became ill and took a medical retirement from his job and finally passed away in 1973. Lura was fifty years old at the

time of Johnny's death. He was fifty-two. Lura worked for twenty more years at the Spottswood Post Office as an assistant to the acting postmaster, Viney Campbell.

The old home where Lura lived was needing a lot of repairs so it was torn down and in 1982 Lura moved into a new home on the same property where she continues to reside when she's not dividing her time with her daughter, Ann, and daughter-in-law Carolyn. Her only son, Bobby, passed away this past year after a long illness.

Over the years, Lura has had many interests but her love of genealogy began back in 1982 when she met Ruth Coffman, a distant relative who called and asked if Lura's mother would go across the mountain to show her where all the old people lived up and down the North Fork of the Tye River where they came from. Ruth also wanted to find and record the graves in the mountain cemeteries of the same area. Lura went along and said after visiting the old graveyards and hearing the stories of the people buried there, she was smitten and began documenting the genealogy from her own family as well as those from the Taylor, Campbell, Phillips, Fitzgerald, Allen, Bradley, Coffey, Painter, Hamilton, Harris and Ramsey families. Lura confided that one summer she and other genealogists from these families identified and inventoried thirty-seven cemeteries within a seven-mile radius of Montebello. Lura said much of her family's history she got from her mother and suggests that now is the time to talk to the elders in your own family before they are gone and take their memories with them to the grave.



Lura with daughters, Ann and Carolyn



A memorable gift from a neighbor

On December 24, 2022, Lura celebrated her 100th birthday milestone and on January 7th of the new year, friends and family gathered at Old Providence Church in Steele's Tavern for a "come and go" afternoon birthday party to honor Lura; a gentle woman, full of talent and generosity of spirit that is hard to find in today's world.