

More About Melissa D. Fitzgerald



In many of the old issues of Backroads there were mentions about a girl named Melissa who lived on the North Fork of the Tye River. Preacher Billy Morris, who bought the old Fitzgerald homeplace along the North Fork, wrote about the early history of the home and the people who had lived there. In one of his conversations with Mrs. Teressie Coffey who was in her late nineties at the time, she related the generations of Fitzgerald's who had lived in the home. One of these was Reuben Pendleton Fitzgerald who had a daughter named Melissa. Melissa was mentioned several times in Preacher Billy's writings and in the September 1985 issue of Backroads a lady by the name of Della Snead Fitzgerald wrote a letter to the editor detailing more information on Melissa's life. Before I print what she wrote, here is what we already knew about Melissa

Melissa D. Fitzgerald's grave marker in the Fitzgerald Cemetery

Melissa D. Fitzgerald was engaged to be married at age seventeen, to a Snead man living on Fork Mountain, near Montebello. But before they married Melissa died of typhoid fever. The man who was to be her husband was so grief stricken that he mourned her for many years before finally marrying someone else. Years later, when his life was drawing to an end, his last wishes were to be buried next to his first love, Melissa. He wrote a 16-verse song about this tragic event that changed the course of his life. Because the song was never written down, only memorized and sung by various people down through the years, the song was lost among the folds of time.

There were some who could recall a few of the verses and the man who wrote them but the rest of the story was slowly forgotten. But a new light was shed on Melissa's life when Della Fitzgerald took the time to write a letter to *Backroads*, relating the story in its entirety, including six of the original verses of the song dedicated to Melissa.

Dear Lynn,

A friend of mine has given me several issues of your magazine, *Backroads*, which I have enjoyed. I was born and raised on Fork Mountain and am familiar with the area. In the March 1985 issue, you had a story about a young girl named Melissa D. Fitzgerald, who died in 1870. The young man she was engaged to marry was my grandfather, Walter Downey Snead. He was the father of James Crist Snead, who was my daddy. I have written six of the verses I remember of the song he wrote about her. I know there were other verses but I can't remember them. The name of the song was "Cheer Me in My Lonely Hours." My grandfather was very poetical and wrote a lot of other songs as well.

Grandfather finally married Azella Campbell in February 1972 and they had seven children; five sons and two daughters. The last one of the family, Minnie Snead Anderson, died at age 95 in Covington, Virginia, where she had lived for 72 years. She died on May 30th and is buried in Alleghany Memorial Park near Covington.



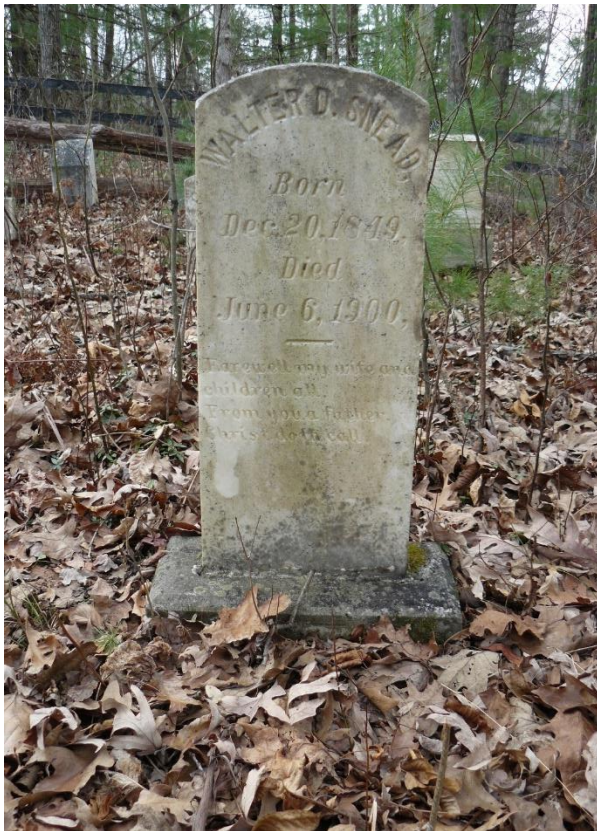
Walter Downey Snead, Sr.



Azella Maria Campbell Snead



The Snead Family Cemetery on Fork Mountain



Walter Downey Sneads gravestone



Azella Maria Campbell Snead gravestone

Grandfather Snead raised his family on the old slave farm on Fork Mountain. I wonder if you have any information on that farm? It was owned by a man by the name of Lem Turner of Amherst County and it was a very productive farm before the Civil War. The property had 1,300 acres and was cleared and worked by slaves.

After the War, the land was sold to local people in smaller tracts. My Grandfather bought one of the tracts there and later died at fifty-one years of age. His sons finished paying for the land after his death. There are a few people living now who know much about the history of the Fork Mountain area.

My family all moved away from that area so there are a few Sneads living in Nelson County that I am related to. I married Fulton Fitzgerald who was raised at Montebello. He was the son of Dorsey B. and Eula Campbell Fitzgerald. They were married on August 20, 1927. Fulton died on January 28, 1982, at 78 years of age.

Dorsey B. Fitzgerald was a well-educated man for his day and taught school in the different one-room schools in the area for a number of years.

I don't know if what I've written will be of any interest but I thought the song might be of interest to the *Backroads* readers such as Mabel Ramsey who knew several of the verses, too.

We mountain people have a great heritage and I'm proud of my ancestors who made a life for themselves in a wilderness in the "New World." I hope to meet you sometime.

Sincerely Yours,
Della Snead Fitzgerald

Lynn's Note: Della and I did finally meet when I interviewed her at her Buena Vista home for the third Backroads book, Faces of Appalachia. Also, Mabel Ramsey sang to Preacher Billy, two verses of the song Walter Snead had written about Melissa D. Fitzgerald but they were duplicates of the ones Della had sent. To see six verses of the song, please look below. Both Walter Downey and Azella Maria Campbell Snead are buried in the Snead family cemetery on Fork Mountain Lane near Montebello.

“Cheer Me in My Lonely Hours”

Written by Walter Downey Snead

b. Dec. 20, 1849 - d. June 6, 1900

**Cheer me in my lonely hours,
Dear Lord, how can this be?
You’ve taken from me the only pleasure,
There was on earth for me.**

**Many a rose has bloomed and died,
Many a lily, too.
Many a friend has passed away,
But none so dear as you.**

**She was the darling of my heart,
Forever dear she’ll be.
She’s sleeping silent in her grave,
The dearest place on earth to me.**

**The last farewell I can’t forget,
The last farewell in life.
I hugged and kissed her dear sweet lips,
She said she would be my wife.**

**Death has robbed me of my bride,
How can I ever forget?
And when I’m called from earth away,
Please lay me by her side.**

**It was so hard to give her up,
If this could be undone.
I’d give my life for that dear girl,
Before tomorrow’s sun.**