

The Journal of Lora Ethel Fitzgerald Allen Matheny

Fork Mountain/Montebello



Lynn's Note: In the twenty-five years of publishing Backroads, Ethel was often included in interviews, family reunions, and photographs. When I shared with Gary Allen that I was going to write another book, he asked if I would be interested in his Grandmother Ethel's handwritten journal about her early childhood memories on Fork Mountain, near Montebello. Reading it was such a treasure, and I'm glad she had the foresight to pen her experiences down on paper. Thanks to Gary for bringing it to the surface and not letting her written words molder, forgotten in some attic. Although there is no date as to when Ethel wrote the journal, she was born in 1903 and died in 2005 at 102 years of age.

Ethel Allen Matheny at ninety-six years of age

My memory started as child back when I was very young, while Aunt Susan Wood was still living. Also, her sickness and death from blood poisoning when a chestnut burr pricked her hand. Papa bathed her hand in carbolic acid and dressed it daily. I remember her funeral. Papa held me up in his arms, and I had on black patent slippers. It's funny to remember what I wore, being so young.

I was the fourth child born to my parents, Alfred McElroy Fitzgerald (Jan. 8, 1879 – May 9, 1966) and Lelia Burgess Bradley Fitzgerald (May 14, 1879 – Oct. 16, 1918). I was born on May 4, 1903.



Alfred M. Fitzgerald family: Ethel standing center front

We lived at what we called the “Old Place” at that time. It contained 43 acres of land. Next, I can remember when my sister Velma was born. My older sister Pearlle took us smaller children, and we went to Grandma Sophia and Grandpa Henry’s. We had to leave home before breakfast and walk the short distance. Pearlle took eggs for us to eat for breakfast in a half-gallon molasses

bucket. When we returned home, a little black-haired baby was lying in bed with Mama, and that was Velma. After she was born, Grandpa Henry, who was a Baptist preacher, decided we needed a larger house to live in, so Papa and our family moved over to where they lived, and they moved over to where we lived.



Foundation stones of the Fitzgerald homeplace

I remember us moving, and the first night we were staying in our new house I had to sleep upstairs. I was five years old, and Papa sat by my bed until I went to sleep because I was afraid. It was too early for Pearlle to come to bed, because they all had work to do after moving in. Grandpa Henry decided to sell Papa the house we had just moved in for five hundred dollars if he would take care of him and Grandma Sophia for the rest of their lives. Papa did take care of them, and later they moved in with us and we loved having them there. When they lived to themselves, I had to carry a half-gallon of fresh milk daily to them and keep them in eggs, pork meat, & vegetables. Sometimes Pearlle went with me if we had much to carry to them.

Our grandparents never scolded us at any time. They were always so kind and good to us. When they lived alone, we would go see them and they always had pound cake or wheat bread baked in what we call hoecake. They would give us a slice of cake or split the piece of bread and put butter and jam or some other kind of preserves between the bread. We really did like that it was so tasty.

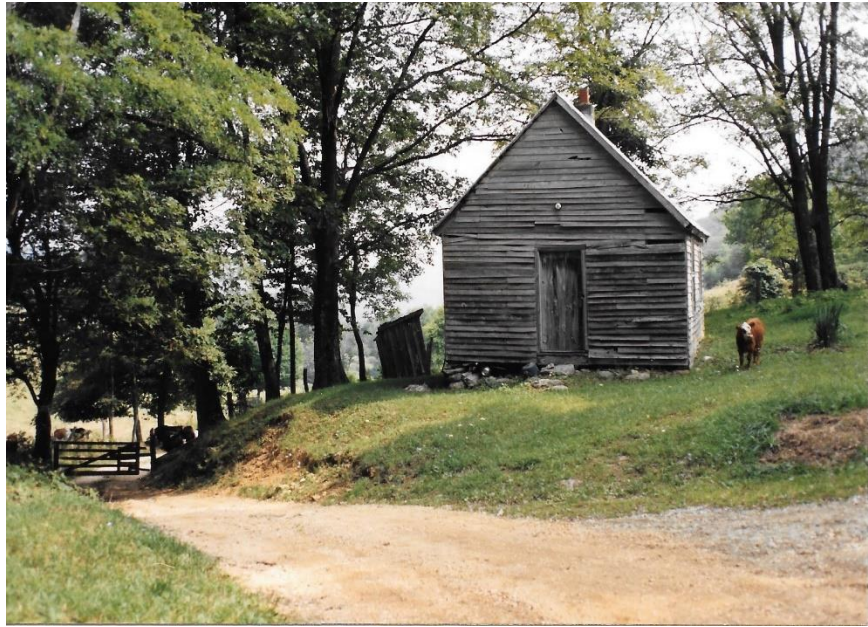
I had two sisters and one brother older than me. I was the fourth born in the family. There were seven children in all: Lottie Burgess, Lula Pearl, William Boyd, Lora Ethel, Henry Claiborne, Ollie Velma, and Dura Mabel. We grew up on a farm in Nelson County, Virginia, and there was always work to do on a farm. The older ones had to work in the fields, getting up hay, hoeing corn, and feeding cattle, sheep, and hogs. My job was carrying water to the field in a small bucket for them to drink and milking cows during the summer. Claiborne and myself did most of the milking during the summer, and we had a big yellow cat that learned to follow us to the milking gap, as we called it, and we would squirt milk in his mouth everyday until he'd be full.

Claiborne and I usually worked together, and we walked to Montebello to get the mail and a few groceries. As soon as we were old enough, we would carry a few eggs and sometimes an old hen to sell to pay for what we bought. Mama kept chickens, a few turkeys, ducks, geese, and some guineas. The guineas would hide their nests of eggs, and we'd have a terrible time trying to find them. When the ducks and geese would make a nest of their own, they would begin laying their eggs, and you had to take a large spoon to get their eggs out from under them. If you put your hand in the nest, they would move and make a new one, and then you would have to hunt forever to find their new nest.

Growing up on a farm meant everyone had a work chore. We grew up in a Christian home where we always went to church on Sunday. Mama and Papa got up early, and he and William went to the barn to feed the stock and then came back to the house where my mother would have a big breakfast cooked. Before we ate, we all went to the living room where Papa read the Bible and said a prayer.

Going to school was a must, and as soon as we were old enough, we would go. If the weather was too bad for us to walk, Papa always took us horseback; or if it was a deep snow, he would hook up his farm sled and take us. He would also pick up other children on the way if they wanted a ride. We only had seven months of school at that time. I finished the seventh grade and we had no high school near us.

Lottie got married to Harper Steele when she was only fifteen years old. Papa sold him twenty-nine acres of land and Harper built a house close to us, and it is still standing there. Grandpa Henry married them on an August Sunday at the beginning of what they called the “Big Meeting,” now called a revival. It lasted each day through Friday. There was a service at eleven o’clock



and dinner on the grounds and *Fork Mountain School where the Fitzgerald children attended* another service at two o’clock. Papa always had a farm wagon, so he would hookup two horses and take the family each day to church. Mama had to cook for each day’s lunch at church. William and I got old enough to walk with neighbor friends. Saturday was the baptizing day at the mill dam in old Montebello. We had lots of fun walking, but when I got too old (thirteen), I began to date. Since it was Perry Allen, Uncle Davis Allen’s son, Papa didn’t say anything to me. He had told me I could not date young, but since Pearl had also married at age fifteen to Talmage Campbell, he let me be. They got married on March 15, 1914.



Harper and Lottie Burgess Fitzgerald Steele

At this time, Grandpa Henry and Grandma Sophia were still living with us and after Talmage and Pearl were married, they went to live in Papa’s house, which we called the “Old Place.” My grandparents went to live with them, and Grandpa had a stroke that July. A blood vessel broke in his head while he was sitting on the porch, and he fell out of his chair, dead. This was the only time in my

life I could not shed a tear but felt like I was choking to death. Grandpa Henry was born November 1, 1836, and died July 6, 1914. Grandma Sophia came to live with us after his death. She was born March 3, 1836, and died November 13, 1918. Back at that time, Papa kept hogs and raised pigs to butcher for family use. He killed the hogs at home, and neighbors came to help in the fall when the weather turned cold enough to salt the meat down so it would not spoil. They had a big iron kettle to render fat down to make lard. A fire was built outside, and when the fat was finished it was poured through a strainer and the cracklin’s were kept to put in the cornbread.

They raised all kinds of vegetables for home use, and we never knew anything about going hungry or going without food. We had so many beans of so many kinds to pick in the fall. Papa had a bank barn, and he poured many a sack of beans on the barn floor and would take frails when the beans were dried in the hull and frail them. The beans would be piled under the hulls, and we had to take the hulls off and gather the beans. They would be put in a wheat fan that had a tray like a sifter, and it cleaned the trash out of the beans. We had bags of shelled beans to eat, and we sold a lot at three cents per pound. The money helped buy our fall and winter clothes.

We also had a chestnut orchard, and we would pick up two and three-gallon buckets full of chestnuts in a short time. Papa would fill a two-bushel sack and get on his horse and take them to Montebello and sell them.

In 1915, Mama got real sick, and the doctors said she had Bright's disease, which is a kidney infection. Papa was good at nursing sickness, so Mama got over that attack. What her real problem was, she was a diabetic, and no doctor at that time knew how to treat her for that. They didn't know about diabetes, and Mama got pregnant and had our youngest sister, Mabel, on July 2, 1918. Mama died on October 16th of that year, when Mabel was three and a half months old. This left Papa, Grandma Sophia, William, myself, Claiborne, Velma and baby Mabel at home. Not any of the family knew how to mix formula for Mabel, but Papa had been making it and continued to do so, but the baby was not getting along well. Papa said that Mama's voice came to the foot of his bed one night and told him how to mix Mabel's formula. He did what she said, and baby Mabel began to do real good.

People back then had corn shucking's at night, and neighbors came to help each other get their corn in. As it happened, Harper, my brother-in-law, was having such a gathering at their barn on November 13, 1918. Papa had come home, and it was bed time. Grandma Sophia had already gone up to bed, and I went up soon after Papa came in. We found that she had died that quick after going to bed. It was a little less than a month from the time that Mama died. This was so hard on our dad, to lose a wife and a grandma. Grandma Sophia was like his own mother, for she took him when he was two years old and raised him until he was married.

That fall, William went back to a two-room schoolhouse at Peter Spring, and the next fall, he left home and went to Fork Union Military Academy. He never came home to stay after he left that time. Claiborne went to live with our sister Pearl, so Velma, Mabel, and Papa stayed at home. Soon after, I left to live with my sister Lottie, who lived near Eagle Rock. I had been dating Eugene Montgomery Allen, the man I married, for seven months, so we decided to get married on July 14, 1920, at Salt Peter Cave, Virginia. Eugene and his brother Leslie had bought a farm, so we went there to live the day after we were married. We lived there until September and found the land was no good to farm. Eugene came to South River Lumber Company and got a job, so we sold our farm and moved to Round Hill, and the lumber company furnished us with a two-room shanty to live in. When we moved in, I was happy, for everything looked nice. We didn't



have much furniture but enough for what we needed. Then, Eugene's brother Claude came to live with us, and we sent him to school where Beulah Fauber was the teacher.

Papa came to see us and brought Mabel to stay a few days, for they didn't get

The Peter Spring School where my brother William attended

to come to our wedding. Eugene was working for four dollars per day and we had been married for two months when I found I was pregnant with our son, Dennis. I had no one to tell me about pregnancy except my mother's sister, and she lived not far from us; so, I told her I was pregnant, and I got help from her. Back then, teenagers didn't know a lot about sex like they do now. Our parents never talked about sex to us, and I was plain dumb about it before marriage. My married sister told me a few things just a week before I was married.



Eugene Allen and wife Ethel after their marriage



We moved from Round Hill to the Tye River on Durham's Run in January of 1921, and Dennis was born there on June 10th. Aunt Martha Ann Bradley was the midwife, and I got along good. She stayed with me all night, and when she went home, my grandmother came and stayed several days since by then my own mother had died.

We moved to Papa's tenant house that September, and I kept Mabel in the daytime so Velma could go to school. When school

Ethel and son Glenn at their mountain farm
was out, we rented a house from Uncle Tom Bradley, Mama's brother, which was just on the hill above Fork Mountain schoolhouse where I had gone to school and got my education.



The Fork Mountain Girls, left to right: Ethel, Velma and Mabel



Ethel at 96 years with three of her children: Glenn, Louise and Maxie