

# “In 1935, I Saw the Match When It Was Struck ”

## *The Life of James Fredrick Bell, Sr.*

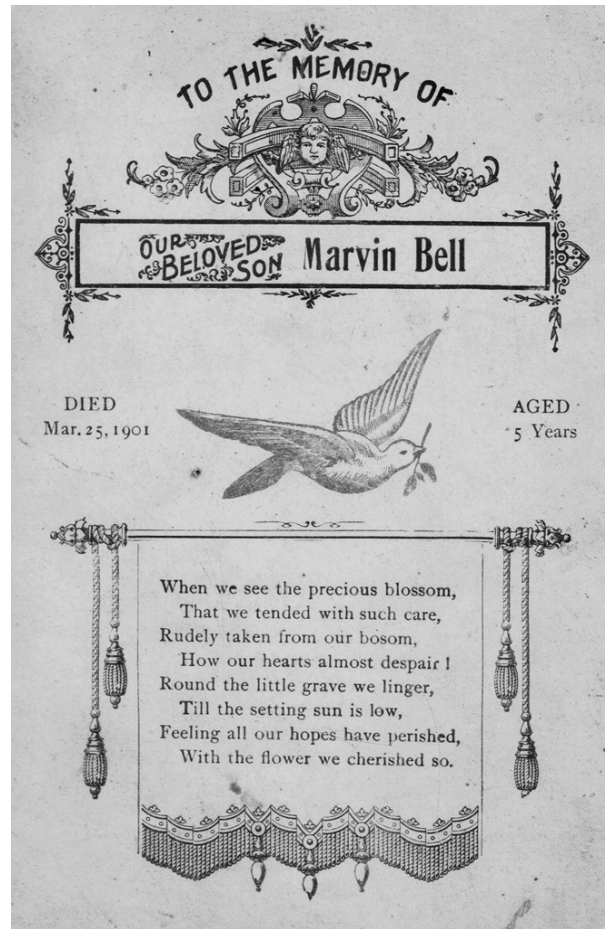
Written by Jackie Layne Partin

Today, 2009, my “bestest friend in all the world,” Edwene Johnson, lives in the old Bell family house behind Foster and Lay Funeral Home. In years past, the yard was full of huge, aged, oak and maple trees. Then at different times, a couple of them decided to partially recline on the old house, even one showing up inside Edwene’s kitchen in the middle of a rainy night. Now most of those ancient ones have been sawn asunder, and the old house has been mended and improved. I go in and out of the house from time to time, but I rarely fail to remember that it is one of the older ones in Tracy City and has some interesting, sad and happy memories hidden deep in the crevices of its structure. Sometimes it is good to go out to the tool shed, bring out the crowbar and pry into the crevices of an old house; one might see scenes and hear voices from its past inhabitants. James “Jim” Fredrick Bell was born on **July 15, 1918** in Chattanooga, Tennessee, but six years later, the old house in Tracy City became his new home.

Jim’s paternal grandparents were Allen Tribble Bell (born **14 July 1865**), son of Harrison and Rachel (Laxson) Bell of Bells Cove in Grundy County, Tennessee, and Mary H. (Crouch) Bell (born **1868**), the daughter of Moses and Elizabeth Crouch. Tribble and Mary grew up as neighbors. Before **1900**, “Trib” Bell, an attorney at law, and his wife Mary had moved from the cove into one of the two Hunt family houses in Tracy City, Tennessee. Foster and Lay Funeral Home was the other house originally owned by the Hunt family. The Bells have handed down a story that Mr. Hunt built the smaller house for one of his children. In **1880**, W. R., (William Richard) Hunt, and Rachel Hunt, [Rachel Rebecca (O’Connor) Hunt], had one son, James O. Hunt. Mr. Hunt was a railroad car builder, and Rachel kept a “sleeping house,” which I assume was something like a hotel. By 1900, they had adopted a daughter, Alice Marler, who seemed to be near the same age as their son. These Hunts probably were the original owners of both houses.

Trib and Mary were parents to six sons, Jesse Allen (1887), William Gilbert (1889), John L. (1892), Robert M., fondly called (Boots), (1893), Roy Marvin (1896), and James, or “Jamie,” as the baby son was called, (1898). Mary was so busy that she had to hire an older lady, Nancy Guinn, to move in and assist her with the boys. Now comes the part of writing stories that I do not like, and that is—talking about the deaths of little babies or children. The Bells’ last two sons, Roy Marvin and Jamie died within three weeks of each other in March 1901.

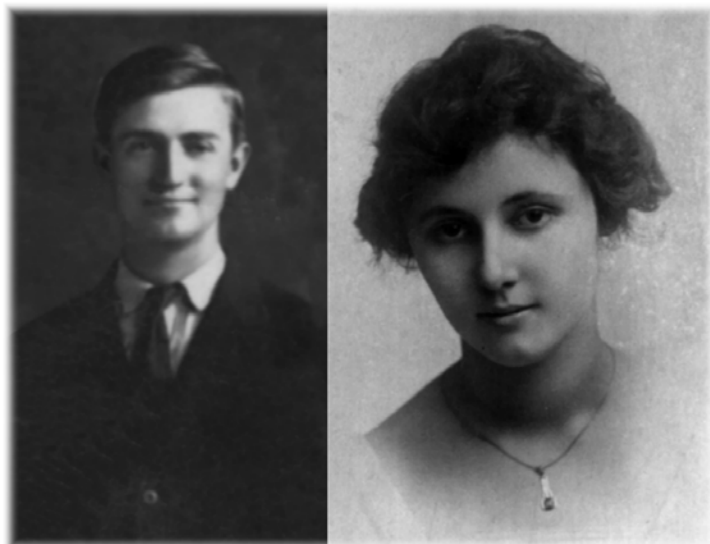
There had been sixteen reported cases of smallpox in Tracy City a few months before the children died, but it seemed to have run its course, with all patients recovering. Little Marvin was five and Jamie three-years-old when they lost their lives to some illness. There's a deafening silence in a house when a family returns from the cemetery after such burials. *(I was six when my nineteen-month-old brother Larry died after a lingering illness. His burial and the return home from the cemetery are etched in my mind; I remember my parents sitting and saying nothing for hours, as though there was nothing that could be said.)* On the 6<sup>th</sup> of March, the Bells had **six** sons; on the 28<sup>th</sup> of March, they had **four**. *"A wife who loses a husband is called a widow. A husband who loses a wife is called a widower. A child who loses his parents is called an orphan. But...there is no word for a parent who loses a child, that's how awful the loss is!"* - Neugeboren 1976, 154."



An ever flowing, mountain creek, which rose several feet during a heavy rain, bordered the yard of the Bell house or actually Douglas Street, which ran parallel to the creek. *(It is now known as Shelby Road in memory of the present owners' granddaughter who lost her life in a tragic car accident.)* Within sight of the front porch was an old wooden bridge that crossed over the creek as an extension of Laurel Street. What an ideal place to rear four energetic boys! Young William Gilbert grew up playing in that creek, but even more fascinating to him was watching the trains at the roundhouse near the Tracy City Depot. He studied the switching of the engines and the coupling of the railcars. He saw the sights and heard the noises of the trains as they chugged in and out of the mining town. No doubt, he yearned to be part of the adventure of railroading. What little boy wouldn't? When Mary looked for him, she could almost bet that he was at the railroad roundhouse or depot or somewhere in the switchyard dreaming of the day he could be "a railroad man."

One by one the boys became young men and went out into the world to find their roles in life. Jesse, John and Robert went south to Birmingham, Alabama to first find work, then to have fun playing baseball for a company there. William Gilbert moved to Chattanooga where he found his soul mate and a job.

On **October 20, 1915** in Hamilton County, Tennessee, William Gilbert married Alice Lucille Rawlings (1896) of Silverdale in Hamilton County whose parents were John Thomas Rawlings (1848-1922) and Elizabeth (McKelvy) Rawlings (1855-1947). They became the parents of four children: William Gilbert, Jr. (1916), James "Jim" Fredrick (1918), Margaret Elizabeth (1921) and Eugene Robert (1923). William Gilbert, Sr.'s occupation was just what he had dreamed of doing when he was a child in Tracy City. He was a switchman for the Nashville, Chattanooga and St. Louis Railroad.



**William G. Bell and his new bride Alice Lucille (Rawlings) Bell**



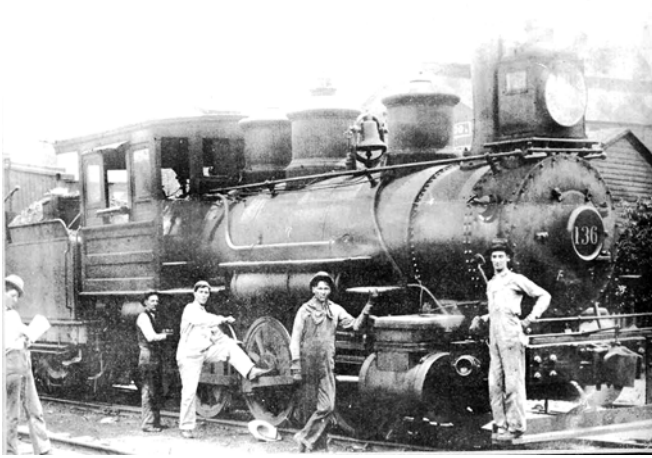
**Seated: James F. Bell and his older brother William Gilbert Bell, Jr.**



**Back: L to R: Unknown; John Thomas Rawlings; Elizabeth (McKelvy) Rawlings; William Gilbert Bell, Sr.**

**Front: Gracie Rawlings; Annie Mae Rawlings; Alice Lucille (Rawlings) Bell**

Just like thousands of men around him, William arose on the morning of **March 01, 1923** and headed off to work. The year **1923** was during what was tagged "the roaring twenties." Life was good for the Bell family. William had a beautiful wife, three young children and another one on the way; his railroad job allowed the family to live comfortably. There was nothing unusual about that day; the weather was still cold and a bit foggy. Lucille began her



**Chattanooga Switching Crew  
Standing beside Engine No. 136**

**Left to Right: J. L. Morris – switch engine foreman, Tom Mayers – engineer, John O'Connor – fireman, H. W. Easley and William Gilbert Bell, Sr. – switchman**

day with housekeeping and chasing after the three small children. The fog had laden the telegraph lines with ice so that they sagged lower toward the earth. That evening William was walking along the top of one of the moving boxcars, as he had done many times before, but the fog mingled with smoke from the train did not allow William to see his predicament until it was too late. He was struck by the sagging telegraph wires, and tragically, not only was battered by them, but by the ragged cinders on the side of the railroad tracks where his beaten body came to rest. On **March 05, 1923**, four days after the accident, William succumbed to his injuries. Twenty-seven-year-old Lucille, grieving the loss of her young, beloved husband, had to face the reality that she was four-months pregnant, a widow and now the only parent to their three young children. The Railroad and the Telegraph Companies awarded Lucille, the sum of seven thousands dollars in the tragic death of her husband.

On **July 27, 1919**, a year after his grandson, James Fredrick Bell, was born, Tribble Bell had died at the age of fifty-four from drinking poison whiskey – probably caused by lead poisoning. After the death of his two sons, he seemed to be unable to cope at times and used alcohol to soften his pain. Drs. Stone, Barnes and Hayes were all in Tracy City at the time and lived quite near, but Mary must not have realized that her husband was more than intoxicated, or she could have possibly gotten help for him. One family note says that Mary thought he was just sleeping. Trib Bell was buried in the family plot in such a position as to leave room for Mary to be interred, when the time came, between her husband and her babies. The widowed Mary continued living in her home in Tracy City.

Four years later in **1923**, after her son William was laid to rest in Chattanooga, she so kindly beckoned her daughter-in-law Lucille, along with the grandchildren, to come share her home. After the birth of her fourth child Eugene and some time for healing, Lucille did move to Tracy City. Now the Bell home was once again vibrant with the voices and laughter of young children. Once again, the “crawdads” were no longer safe in their hiding places in

the creek; the “minners,” as the boys called them, were frantically swimming for safety, and the “waterdogs” crawled deeper under the rotting logs and stumps where the Bell brothers and their sister Margaret could not find them. Once again there were young male children paying particular attention to what went on at the Depot, the Round House and on the railroad tracks near their new home. Lucille and her children were never completely removed from the memories of their husband and father, his occupation and his tragic death.



**Seated: Mary (Crouch) Bell  
with Margaret & Eugene Bell**



**Bell House today (2009): David and Edwene  
(Meeks) Johnson now own the house.**

It wasn't easy for Lucille to lose her husband, give birth to their son without William being there to hold her hand or to see his newborn, then move from one city to another and try to maintain a normal life for her children. Tracy City was a rather large place in **1924**, so the children didn't get lonely, and Lucille had other women to help her heal. Maybe living near the trains was healing for her, or maybe it haunted her with fears that one of her sons might want to work the rails one day. Later on, when workers were needed at the Tracy City Mattress Factory, she took a job to help support her family.

Six-year-old Jim Bell began his formal education at the James K. Shook School in **1924**. He recalls Mrs. Maggie Shook being one of his teachers—“and she paddled me,” he said. On that particular occasion, he remembered that Fritz Flury pinched him and caused him to yell out in the classroom. Not realizing what had just happened, Mrs. Shook spanked Jim on the hand with a ruler. “Ouch!”

“Oh, Jim, you didn't really get spankings, did you?” I asked. “Yes, lots of them!” he quickly and firmly replied.

He loved adventure, but his intentions were never to be a troublemaker or disobedient, but he meant to fill his life as full of exploits and exploration as humanly possibly. You are only young once. However, sometimes he and the boys in the area got into some dangerous episodes and participated in quite daring deeds. For example, the train tracks from Tracy City ran out passed White City a bit. The track branched off to many coalmine areas such as the Grundy Lakes and up the hill at Myers Hill. On the week-ends, Jim and other boys would “borrow” a non-motorized railroad, work car from Tracy City and push it along the tracks passed where the Church of Christ is now located, on past the present location of the Dari-Delite, then up on top of Myers Hill. Yes, you guessed it—the boys all jumped on the car and rode it back down into Tracy City. Wow! I would have loved to have been on one of those rides; well, maybe not on the one when someone threw a switch on the track as the boys were coming back into town causing them to be thrown from the car. Thankfully, no one was hurt. If Willie Six of Sewanee, Tennessee were still alive, he could tell us all about his wild ride on a flat car—not down Myers Hill, but down the Sewanee/Cowan mountain.

And then there was the night when Jim and the boys waited for Sammy Baker to park the delivery truck for the night at the Ice Plant near the Heading in Tracy City. Mr. Elbert Anderson would then lock up. They just had to see what was going on inside the plant with its big tanks, so they found a way inside. Guess who managed to fall into one of the tanks filled with three feet of brine water! You’re right: it was Jim Bell. Sometimes an audacious spirit can be diluted by such a thing as cold, brine water. What mothers don’t know won’t hurt them!

Jim’s boyhood wasn’t all fun and games. He did have a job delivering newspapers around town. One might say that it was a dangerous job even in those days; one really dark night, over near the beautiful, Martin Marugg house on Lankford Town Road, while coming home on his bicycle from his deliveries, Jim ran into something big in the road. It turned out to be Dock Marler’s cow. Again Jim was okay, but the old cow was just a little bit upset. He earned half a penny for every newspaper he sold, so he was able to save a little money for those important things he wanted to do like fly in an airplane. A small open-cockpit plane flew into Tracy City one day, and for a small fee, the pilot would take people for a flight above the town. The plane had landed in the field behind Flury’s Store. Jim grabbed his money, and off he went to spend it. Of course, not a word was said to his mother about his intentions. The flight was his greatest adventure so far, and he could hardly wait until the next opportunity came along to do something even more exciting, but on the next day something happened that made him think twice about being so impulsive. He noticed a crowd had converged upon a certain area of town, and off he ran to see what all the excitement was about. There he found that the same plane he had flown in the day before had been overloaded and crashed after clearing Flury’s Store. Thankfully, there were no

serious injuries. I wonder if Lucille ever found out that her son had been in that plane without her knowledge.

Throughout Jim's childhood, he watched the trains come and go on the other side of Railroad Avenue in front of their house. When old enough, he visited at the depot and chatted with Mr. Vaughn Davis who was the station operator; he greeted those getting on and off the passenger cars. In the evenings, he talked with Mr. Henry Newsome, the old watchman at the engine house. He loved everything about the rail system; he walked the tracks to school. It was difficult to go anywhere in town without interacting with the trains and tracks. William Gilbert Bell, Sr. lived within his son, Jim, who was destined to take to the rails one way or the other.

When Jim was ten years old, a stranger, who would change his life and those of many other boys in the area, came to town. Father A. C. Adamz took on the job of vicar at Christ Church on the corner of 7<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Streets. He served there from 1928 until 1941. His work with the local Boy Scouts, Troop 12, was extraordinary. With his father missing in his life, this was just what young Jim and his brothers needed. All the wonderful, outdoor adventures that any young boy would want to be involved in were experienced in the Boy Scouts led by Father Adamz. Jim said, "He was a good man, and the boys all respected him." His efforts kept many young boys out of trouble by keeping them busy when school was not in progress.

According to Jim, Troop 12, featured the world's largest Boy Scout museum, and it was taken to Chicago, Illinois, and placed on exhibition. When at home in Tracy City, it was housed in the Redman Lodge Hall, formerly the Miners' Hall. Father Adamz taught the boys how to do taxidermic work on all kinds of animals including a large mud turtle donated by Mr. C. H. Kilby and a two-headed calf. In glass containers, the museum displayed lizards, eggs, embryos of babies at different stages, and other interesting creatures that were preserved in formaldehyde. My husband was told that when his grandfather George Willie Schild lost his arm in a sawmill accident, Father Adamz preserved the arm. When George Willie died, the arm was placed with the rest of his body in the casket. He always complained about phantom pain in his missing hand. As he lay in his casket, his son Joe saw a splinter under his father's fingernail on his severed arm, so he took his pocketknife and removed it. Joe then said to his father, "Now Papa, maybe you can rest!"

Guests from thirty-three states and five foreign countries had signed in at the museum in Tracy City where they saw the Lord's prayer written on a pin head; a twenty penny nail bitten into by a man; an Ichneumon fly which could with its three long hairs (ovipositors) penetrate two inches of solid wood; arrow heads; an Indian tomahawk; coin collections; and the list goes on and on. The museum was eventually moved to the old roundhouse near the

Boy Scout Park. Throughout the years, the collections and projects that had had the hearts and souls of Troop 12 and Father Adamz poured into them, have been vandalized, stolen and taken to private homes for keeping. It would be so nice if known pieces could be returned to the Grundy County Historical Society for safe keeping with the few remaining items.



**The old mud turtle is still hanging around. He must be around eighty years or more in his present state of taxidermy.**



**Annual trip to Salt Peter Cave (Dec. 26, 1932)  
Jim Bell is in the center without a cap.**



**Father A. C. Adamz**

Locally, camping trips were made to Foster Falls, Fiery Gizzard Gulf, Salt Peter Cave, and many other exciting places. There were usually fifteen or twenty boys in attendance on one of those trips; Father Adamz always directed the activities and kept a watchful eye on



the curious young boys. When the boys went to Foster Falls, they walked about half of a day to get to the falls where they set up their camp. Everything they needed for a week's adventure was carried on their backs. They traveled the power line route. They had no sleeping bags, so they took their mothers' blankets and quilts and gathered their foods from their mothers' pantries. Potatoes, beans, bacon, bread, whatever could be cooked on an open fire was taken. Once the boys killed a rattlesnake, split it down the middle and peeled off the skin and cooked it over an open fire. "What did the rattlesnake meat taste like?" I asked Jim. "It tasted like chicken." (*I had already been told that, but I still would not cook or eat the dead, skinned and frozen rattlesnake that showed up in my freezer when I was a newly wed.*) All the boys could swim, so if a swimming hole was present then that was a favorite fun time.



**Troop 12 plays in the ocean at Daytona Beach, Florida.  
Jim Bell is standing eighth from the left.**

**Pickled Snake**

Lucille Bell raised a garden with the help of her children, and of course, Granny Bell was just the greatest at canning and drying vegetables for the winter. At times the garden was on the front side of the house and extended in the direction of the railroad tracks. One chore assigned to Jim and his brothers was to hoe and weed the garden. They hoed right down the rows going in the direction of the railroad tracks, and when they got hot and sweaty, they threw their hoes down at the end of the row, and off they went running in the direction of the Blue Hole in the Fiery Gizzard Creek for a quick, cold swim. When cooled off enough, they came back, picked up their hoes and started back down the rows toward the house. The Bell brothers had learned all the area of the Fiery Gizzard Gulf from their scouting adventures. Years of helping his mother and Granny in the garden gave Jim a love for the soil and farming that stayed with him as long as he was able to stand on his own.

The boy scouts were taught how to make beds from branches and leaves and how to shelter themselves although Jim couldn't remember a time when they were caught out in the rain. I mentioned to him that in one of the Boy Scout photos there was a boy with a cigarette

stuck up each nostril. I asked him, "Did Father Adamz allow the boys to smoke?" "We smoked some!" he answered. Boys will be boys at home and particularly away from home. Jim explained that Father Adamz was not happy when they did smoke. He was a man of character and wanted the young boys in Troop 12 to be the best citizens possible.

On Saturday, **April 27, 1935** around 10:00 p. m., seventeen-year-old Jim was standing at his upstairs bedroom window that gave him a good view of the business section of Tracy City on Railroad Avenue. Was it a barking dog, or the few lamps burning in the town, or just a last good night scan of the outdoors that caused him to look out just at that moment? "I saw the match struck and the flames go straight up the building," he said to me. With curiosity I asked, "Did you see who struck the match?" It was dark, and he could not see the person involved. It took him no time to arouse those in the house and everyone else around, and the heroic efforts to save other buildings began. The fire was just across the creek from the Bell home, so Jim was anxious. That night he and the town of Tracy City witnessed the destruction of ten buildings, some with two or more businesses in them, brought on by an arsonist.

**Some of the burned out buildings can be seen in this photo of the July 04, 1935 parade.**



Jim survived his elementary school years and completed eighth grade at Shook School in **1932**. That meant that he was on his way to the hill, Grundy County High School hill. Like his father before him, Jim was athletic. While his father had participated in baseball, Jim found his interest to lie in the game of football. Usually he ran out the back door of his house, up the road and up the hill to the Grundy County High School each autumn day with the game of the week on his mind. Since the school had been burned in the spring of **1935**, the high school students found themselves in classrooms at the Shook Elementary School. However, the football games continued, and on **October 25, 1935**, the Grundy County High School football team beat the Decherd High School team with a final score of 14 and 0. That night, Jim Bell, #74, played right end position and weighed in at 140 pounds. Some of his fellow teammates in *that* game were Wilburn Sampley, #1, from Monteagle, Fritz Flury, #67,

from Tracy City and J. B. McFarland, #81, from Monteagle and Carden Wilson #69. Of course, the boys would quickly acknowledge that the real strength of the team was Coach John A. Anderson. However, Jim Bell's future wife overheard some of the Decherd players saying that they believed Dr. Bowden had put something in the drinking water during the game that caused them to lose. As to whether the Decherd team meant that Dr. Bowden had put something in the Grundy boys' water to give them energy, or something in the Decherd team's water to make them weak, we will never know. Ahhhh, Sports!!! Don't you just love the workings of them? Today in 2009, we hear, "No, I didn't take steroids; well, maybe I did once, but it was way back when!" Why, all Grundy football fans knew that Dr. Bowden would never, ever do anything to influence the outcome of a game! Would he?

Carden Wilson, team captain, not only played on the team, he drove the bus for the team. One night, Jim Bell was on the field with Carden who was knocked unconscious. Carden managed to complete the game, drive the team back to the high school and take his shower. The problem was that Carden had no remembrance of finishing the game or driving the team home. Scary things like that happen. *(One of my sons was charged by an irate cow trying to give birth to a calf that she could not deliver. He lost twenty-four hours of memory that day and night. He remembers the cow coming toward him, but has no memory of the actual hit and the good stomping she gave him, nor the trip on the ambulance, nor the emergency room doings, nor coming home. I, for one, am thankful that he cannot remember – I wish I could forget seeing it happen and the look on his face when I got to him.)*



**William G. Bell, Sr. in his baseball uniform**



**James F. Bell, Sr. in his football uniform**

Right: the 1934 Grundy County High School Football Team with Coach Anderson at the left; seated 1<sup>st</sup> at the far right is James Fredrick Bell. (#65, Wilburn Sampley—kneeling in the center of the photo was my neighbor in Monteagle on King Street when I was a child.)



Years spent at Grundy County High School were wonderful for Jim, and not without nice surprises. It was at school that he met his future wife Charlotte “Lottie” Partin. She and her sister Ruby graduated from high school in 1935 over at Shook School. As stated before, two months before they were to graduate, the school burned, or as most folks believe—was burned. Classes resumed over at the elementary school. The seniors were not happy that they would not be getting their diplomas at their relatively new high school. Jim Bell graduated the following year, 1936, at Shook School also. Some of the young girls among his classmates were Clara Bone, Melrose Hamby, Irene Rose, Nan McFarland and Lena Grace Patrick. It took a while to get a new high school built for the students.

Once again, in the new generation, one by one the Bell children began to find work and move away from the old house. Jim was still interested in the Boy Scouts, and often made trips with Father Adamz and others who could venture far from home. Some of the states the young men explored were Georgia, Louisiana, Florida, Texas, Virginia, Maryland and Washington, D. C. Jim’s grandmother, Mary (Crouch) Bell died in 1936 leaving a void in the old house. Lucille had taken care of her ailing mother-in-law who had thirteen years earlier given her and the children a place to live and start over. Jim always remembered to send postcards to his “Granny” when he was away from home. She was special in his life when he needed an extra set of arms to hold him; now she was sorely missed.



Jugs Tourist Camp—U. S. 41, Emerson, GA  
Sent August 18, 1935 from Cartersville, GA



“Dear Granny, arrived...planning to go 300 miles tomorrow.” Yours truly, James Bell



In August 1937, he and some other scouts went with Father Adamz to where the first U.S. National Boy Scout Jamboree was held in Washington D. C. For some reason, they missed the huge event, but did manage to get to D. C. Since Father Adamz didn't like to drive, he allowed Carl Sitz to do it.

Once again, Jim found himself flying on a small plane. This time the plane flew over the city at night. The young men with Jim on that flight were Mankin Roberts, son of Byron Roberts, Poochy Thorneberry, son of John Thorneberry, and Carl Sitz, son of George Sitz. Of course, Father Adamz was always behind the camera taking those wonderful photos for the parents to see all the sights the boys had visited. A trip down Chesapeake Bay on a large ferryboat was included in that trip.

Somewhere in all the fun Jim was having, he managed in **1938** to include three months of studies at the McKenzie Business College in Chattanooga, but his eagerness to try something different, something that involved the railways, was all consuming. It was in his bones, inherited from his father. He loved the railroad, the train, and the lonesome sound in the distance of the train's whistle. John Perry from Tracy City had gone out to Los Angeles earlier and told Jim that he could get him a job as a window washer. Jim and a friend, Douglas Hindman, also from Tracy City, decided they would "hobo" their way to California. Their trip started in Cowan, Tennessee, and soon they were hopping the trains in Denver, Colorado and Salt Lake City, Utah, working their way to Los Angeles. They mostly rode in freight and flat cars, but they rode in a gondola car through the six-mile long Moffat Tunnel near Denver. Jim was faithful to send postcards to his mother about his whereabouts, so that she could follow him on his way. One postcard had a picture of "Black Rock" protruding out of the Great Salt Lake, which was on the Western Pacific Railroad route. Douglas left Jim somewhere on the trip and went his separate way. John Perry died before Jim could get to Los Angeles, so Jim found his own job in a chicken layer house. He stayed in Los Angeles only two months before thoughts of home and that little town of Tracy City caused him to hop on a train and head east.

Meanwhile on **October 10, 1938** in Pelham Valley, Willie Partin, operator of Bell's Mill, and his family had a public sale of their farm animals and equipment. They were moving to Tracy City to start new businesses. Willie and his wife Octavia had two pretty daughters, Lottie and Ruby, but one specifically had caught the eye of the boy across the creek from

where the Partins General Merchandise Store was to be built. (*The Lunch Box is now located where the Partins' store was built around 1940.*) Jim remembered Lottie from his high school years.



**The new Partins'  
General  
Merchandise Store  
in Tracy City**



The only things that separated Jim Bell from Miss Charlotte "Lottie" Elizabeth Partin were a creek and a job in Chattanooga during the week. He could jump the creek on the weekends, and she was always smiling in the direction of the old Bell house.



As soon as Jim graduated from High School and got his hobo adventure out of the way, he took a job at the Crane Enamelware Company in Chattanooga. He was employed there between **1938-1940**. His first job at the plant was to load 1,000 pounds of scrap iron by hand onto a four-wheel buggy and push it to the cupola for processing. On his visits home, he naturally crossed the creek to step inside Partins' Store to buy a coke, or was it to see the pretty Miss Lottie Partin?

On **November 09, 1940**. Jim and Lottie made a handsome bride and groom with Father Adamz officiating at their ceremony. Jim, the strong athletic football player and railroad man, married the young woman who had educated herself in all aspects of business management. Both were energetic and had a desire to excel—to make advancements in their

lives. Jim took his new bride back to Chattanooga where he continued to work with the Crane Enamelware Company. By that time, he was operating a crane. In **January 1941**, he followed in the footsteps of his father and obtained a job on the railroad as a switchman with the NC&StL Railway at the Cravens Yard in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

We all know what happened next—**December 07, 1941**, the attack on Pearl Harbor. All young men worked with a cloud over their heads. They knew what lay ahead for them, and Jim was no different. He had a new wife and on **December 15, 1942**, a new son, James Fredrick Bell, Jr., was born. He listened to and read the news with a concerned heart for the thoughts of leaving his family when the time came, but he loved his country and was ready to serve if called to do so. Lottie had her work cut out for her being a new mother, but she too, knew it was only a matter of time until her husband would be called up for military duty, and he was. On **October 20, 1943**, he was inducted into the U. S. Army.



**Mr. and Mrs. James Fredrick Bell (center front) on their wedding day. Front: Father Adams; Jim and Lottie Bell; Elbert Tucker; second row: Tommy and Ruby Pack; Ruby (Partin) Long; Margaret Bell; Emily Partin; 3<sup>rd</sup> row: Eugene Bell; 4<sup>th</sup> row: Vernon Osborn; June Merritt; Agnes Duggan; Doug Partin**



**Private James F. Bell, Sr. with wife Lottie and young son James, Jr.**

Jim was granted a leave of absence from the NC&StL Railway and served his country between **1943 and 1946** in the United States Army, Company C, 718<sup>th</sup> Railroad Operating Battalion. The 718<sup>th</sup> was the first railroad battalion to move into France and Germany. It was standard operating procedure to operate the train at night without lights to reduce the chance of being strafed by enemy aircraft. The train operations took the men so close to the front lines that they could hear the roar and see the flashes of fire from the American artillery. In support of the counter attack at the Battle of the Bulge, the 718<sup>th</sup> moved four divisions, including supplies, of the Third Army across the front into the south flank of the Bulge within a forty-eight hour period. They also moved the Seventh Army, which was replacing the Third Army. Jim overseas tour included France, Belgium, Luxembourg and Germany.

Besides moving troops, ammunition and all other wartime supplies, Jim helped in the movement of German prisoners, some of whom were headed for prison in his own home state of Tennessee at Camp Forrest in Tullahoma. Toward the end of the war, German women were hired as cooks for the U. S. troops. Some of the women had sons who were prisoners of war in the United States, and they were appreciative of the good care their sons received in those camps. Oh, for the time spoken of by Carl Sandburg when he said, "**Some time they will give a war, and nobody will come!**"

Jim's brothers William Gilbert Bell, Jr. and Eugene Robert Bell, also went off to battle during World War II. Their sister Margaret had married Elbert Fowler Tucker who became a bomber pilot in the Army Air Corp. He was shot down on a bombing mission over France and spent the remainder of the war as a prisoner of war (POW). Jim missed his wife and son so much while he was away, and just like in his youth he was faithful to write letters home. Lottie kept all his letters. On **January 06, 1946**, Jim was discharged from the Army at Fort Knox, Kentucky with an honorable discharge.



**The crew operated the train at night to lessen the chances of being strafed by enemy gunfire.**

**L to R: James Fredrick Bell, Sr., Thomas N. Burnett, Thomas A. Fowler, John Zable, and Gaile Prist**

After the war, Jim returned to his wife and son, James, Jr., in Tracy City. After helping out at Partins Store for a few months, he moved his family back to Chattanooga where he returned to his former job with the NC&StL Railway. He and Lottie became parents to another son, Lanny Partin Bell, born **April 24, 1947**, while still living in Chattanooga. The young couple talked it over and decided to move back to Tracy City where Lottie had family, and Jim could transfer to the Tracy City branch line known as the Mountain Goat Line.



**On Army Duty: 2<sup>nd</sup> from right:  
James Fredrick Bell, Sr.**



In **1948** Jim was excited to be able to move his family into the old house on the creek where he had lived as a child. The house was full of memories that he could now share with his two sons who wasted no time in heading for the creek where their father and grandfather had played as children. In the early 1950's Jim built a new home for his family on Beersheba Street near Lottie's parents. He did most of the work on the house himself being a skilled carpenter, electrician and plumber. The house was heated mainly by burning Grundy County coal in a large fireplace which had a mantel made of stone that Jim got from Crab Orchard, Tennessee. A new house wasn't all the Bells added to their lives since on **October 12, 1955**, James, Jr. and Lanny were presented with a baby sister, Elizabeth Ann Bell.

At the time Jim started working on the Mountain Goat, the trains were pulled by steam locomotives and primarily transported coal from the local coal mines on the mountain through Sewanee and off to the main line at Cowan, Tennessee. The locomotives were stationed in Tracy City, and the coal cars were weighed in the Tracy City yard. Often on the return trip up the mountain with the empty cars, the train had to double and sometimes triple the mountain. Approximately half or a third of the cars would be brought up the mountain, and then the train was reassembled and preceded on to Tracy City and beyond. Also, it was not uncommon to have doubleheaders and sometimes tripleheaders of steam locomotives and later diesel locomotives on the line.

Although Jim primarily worked out of Tracy City, he also worked on the Tullahoma, Decherd and Shelbyville lines in Tennessee, and the Stevenson, Bridgeport and Huntsville lines in Alabama. At Huntsville the railroad cars were loaded onto a barge at Hobbs Island for the trip upriver to Guntersville, Alabama. Favorite times of Jim's days on the tracks were when he saw little children standing along side the tracks—one being little Billy Joe Church in Tracy City— just waiting on him to throw bubblegum and candy their way. This was a practice that he did for years. During this time frame NC&StL Railway was bought by L&N. The local crewmen besides Jim were Charlie Flynn, Charles Schaerer, William Parmley and Alan Shook. Today in **2009**, Jim is the only one of his crew who is still living. He enjoyed the fellowship with his workmates on the Tracy City Branch Line crew.

Jim has a good sense of humor, but he does not carry on with a lot of foolishness. Occasionally, he has a good story to tell or funny comments to make. When my husband, Grady Ward Partin, was a young boy, he found himself stuck one night at the family grocery store in Tracy without a way home on Partins' Farm Road. His Uncle Jim told him he would take him home, but told him several times that he was going to put him out at the end of the road which would leave a good little walk in the dark for a young boy. Of course, Jim took his nephew all the way home, but he enjoyed "a little joke" every now and then. It was Jim who took his son James, Jr. and Grady Ward to Kennerly Cunningham's little business place

on Apple Orchard Road where Grady Ward saw his first television. Mr. Cunningham had a huge, high tower outside which enabled him to pick up a quite snowy picture of a western movie. Jim involved himself with all the little nieces and nephews and was kind to everyone. Lottie loved to tease her husband and tell a joke occasionally on him; she told that Jim always slept with his feet out from under the covers. When she asked him why he did that, he responded with, "I don't want those cold things in bed with me!"

Jim's sense of humor could have gotten him in trouble while in the Army when he and one of his buddies were yelled at by a young officer who told them that they were not in proper military uniform. As they kept walking, they looked back over their shoulders and said, "We're not in the Army, we work for the railroad." The officer's face turned red with anger, but fortunately, he did not pursue the matter. Jim enjoyed interacting with the customers and delivery personnel at Partins Store. He always liked to joke around with Buster Sweeton who delivered Coca-Cola products from the Tracy City bottling plant. When children came into the store to buy candy, Jim jokingly told them the price, "Two pieces for a nickel or three for a dime." The kids thought long and hard, but would usually make the mistake of saying, "Okay, give me three pieces!"

Snake catching was something Jim learned probably as a boy scout. He taught Grady Ward when he was young just how to grab them behind the head, and then pick them up. One day Jim and his brother-in-law, Roy Elbert Partin, were both in one of the several fields at the Partins' dairy farm. Jim had caught a snake and threatened to throw it on Roy who was deathly afraid of it. Roy kept telling Jim not to throw it on him, but Jim kept advancing; quickly Roy picked up a dried clog of dirt and threatened to hit Jim with it if he didn't stop his shenanigans with the snake. That did not deter Jim, so Roy threw the dirt clod and hit Jim quite hard in the knee; Jim had to drop the snake and grab his knee because of the pain. He started yelling at Roy, "You have broken my knee!!" Roy responded by saying, "I don't care!" It was so wonderful how Jim seemed to melt right in with the Partin family and he became an important person in their lives; storytelling was a big part of that life. I can almost guarantee that anyone who reads this story and has ever been in Partins' Store, never left without hearing a yarn told by one of the Partin/Bell family members.

Lottie eventually returned to her job helping her Partin family in their merchandise store. She was a good buyer and manager for the store. Jim worked with the Partins for years when he was not busy on the railroad. He did whatever job needed to be done whether it was running the cash register or cutting meat in the butcher department. At night when he closed the store, he wrapped the paper money in butcher paper just like it was a pound of baloney and carried it home.



**Left: Jim Bell on the job at the railroad line in Tracy City, TN**



**Lottie (Partin) Bell on the job at Partins' Store**

Years earlier, Lucille Bell had moved back to Chattanooga to be near some of her siblings. The old house was rented out to several families, but she would not rent the upstairs part so that she and her sisters could come back during the summers to visit friends on the mountain; often they planted a little garden. The old house had served the Bell families for years and was now ready to have different occupants.

Jim retired as a conductor in **1979** after thirty-nine years of working on the railroad. Throughout his railroad career, he used the same watch that his father had used when he worked for the NC&StL Railway. Often from Partins Store, he looked across the creek at his old home and memories flashed through his mind. A strange feeling comes over one when the house, wherein he or she grew up, becomes occupied by strangers. It is almost like the heart is being violated. *(This happens to me each time I pass my family's old home in Monteagle.)* The Johnsons were the last renters of the house; Lucille never rented out the upstairs with the understanding that she could come back, stay and reminisce about the years she had spent rearing her family there. Eventually she did sell the house to the Johnsons and occasionally stopped by for a visit. Alice Lucille Bell passed away in Chattanooga on **July 13, 1989**, at the age of ninety-three. She was buried beside her husband in Chattanooga.



**William Gilbert Bell, Sr.'s Watch**



**Jim Bell, the Conductor**

Jim and Lottie's children went on to be successful in their lives and presented their parents with seven grandchildren who then made the family a little larger with three great-grandchildren. He and Lottie instilled in their family the importance of being Christians, and they led by example. Jim, along with many others, helped build the Tracy City First United Methodist Church. He still speaks of the strength of his football coach, John Anderson who would dump a wheelbarrow of concrete and then pick up the wheelbarrow by the handles and shake out any remaining concrete.

Lottie and Jim also worked with the Hobb's Hill United Methodist Church in several capacities. Jim served as a Lay Leader; he and Lottie were Sunday School teachers and both led in many other activities. Jim tore down an old church in Summerfield; then the lumber was used to build Sunday School rooms and restrooms at the church.

Jim's beloved wife Lottie passed away on **June 30, 2007** from a long illness. He stayed by her side as a helpmate would, but if he wandered away sometimes into his own little, happy places, she always kept his whereabouts on her mind for worry that he would not be well or take care of himself. Their love endured.



**L to R: Lanny, Elizabeth, Lottie, James, Sr., and James, Jr. Bell at Jim and Lottie's 50<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary (1990)**



**Grandchildren: Back L to R: Mark, Carissa, Jason, Front: James, Jon and Amy; Sarah not present**

Jim not only was a railroad man and a store manager, but he farmed a lot. Then when his body would no longer allow him to drive the tractor or load the hay, he scratched out some of the most bountiful garden spots that I have ever seen. He worked in the hot sun hoeing his plants until the soil around each was so fine it would slip through one's fingers. There were no weeds in his gardens. During the winter months, he worked large puzzles, one after the other. For a change, now that he has slowed down a bit, he can be found watching sports on television, and up until recently, he cooked breakfast every morning. When I visited in the mornings, every eye on the stove had an iron skillet sitting on it. He loved fried foods,

and they haven't seemed to hurt him one bit. These are little things that make him happy and content. He is not a man of many words, and he has the patience of the Biblical Job.

Jim grew up respecting and loving the memory of his dad and worked hard to make certain that his father would have been proud of him. I know that James Fredrick Bell, Sr.'s children are extremely proud of him. Ninety-one-year old Jim, with the helpful guidance of his children, still travels the countryside. It is with pride that I mention in closing that his grandson, Spec. 4 James Matthew Bell, son of Elizabeth Bell, is following in his grandfather's footsteps by serving our country. He is stationed in Afghanistan as I write this story. Let us all remember his efforts to protect us from our enemies, just as his grandfather did in WWII, and pray for his safe return.



**Pfc. James Fredrick Bell, Sr.**  
**(Service: WWII—1943-1946)**



**Spec. 5 Lanny Partin Bell**  
**(Service: Germany—1971-1972)**



**Spec. 4 James Matthew Bell**  
**(Service: Afghanistan—2009)**

**Jason Bell, son of Lanny and Wanda Bell, works for the U. S. Army as a Test Engineer at Redstone Arsenal, Huntsville, Alabama. He and four other volunteers worked in Iraq from July until November of 2003. They worked with the U. S. Army demolition team to dispose of missiles that were abandoned by the Iraqis during the Gulf War.**



## Some of James Fredrick Bell, Sr.'s Recent Travels and Experiences



**Above: James Fredrick Bell, Sr. being greeted by former Senator Majority Leader Robert "Bob Dole" at the World War II Memorial in Washington, D. C. (19 April 2008)**



**Right: James Fredrick Bell, Sr. in Huntsville, AL. where he received the "Cross of Military Service" presented by the "United Daughters of the Confederacy" for his service in WWII**



**James F. Bell, Sr. stands beside the newly erected RR Statue at the Tracy City Mini-Park (2009)**



**Jim Bell, Sr. with his son Lanny Bell at the World War II Memorial in Washington, D. C. (19 April 2008)**

**Note:** A big thanks to James Bell, Jr. and Lanny Partin Bell for their help by sharing organized notes and photographs for this story. They have allowed me to aggravate them immensely. For comments, additions or corrections, please notify me at [jackiepartin@blomand.net](mailto:jackiepartin@blomand.net) .