

That Goat Ranch

By Jackie Layne Partin

Stored right up on the top shelf of my mind, covered with dust and cobwebs, I found that old goat story. I've not got a long time to shovel these little goat pills, shaped from bits of Grundy County history, off the green pastures, blow off the mold and rotten matter, along with the occasional spider and form them into stories for the readers and for historical preservation.

Okay, the reader has never heard of "**The Goat Ranch**," a venture *almost* experienced in the **1930s** on Pigeon Springs Road formerly known as the Battle Creek Road. It was one of those dreams that one slips right in between a lengthy, frightening, smothering nightmare and thoughts of a nice box of Forrest Gump chocolates—one of those little clips of an upcoming-movie-event. In other words, it is like a vision, experienced one moment but gone the next.

In the Nashville, TN, Ward-Belmont **1932** High School Annual, a young lady, Sallie Sheppard Wood, attended classes. She was the daughter of William Sheppard and Sallie (McCorkle) Wood. She followed in her mother's footsteps and continued her education until she had four years of college to her credit.

On May 5, **1933**, Ernest Campbell "E. C." Norvell, one of Tracy City's former, notable undertakers and real estate dabbler, sold approximately one hundred acres of land that once belonged to the Ephraim Madison and Clercy (Wooten) Haynes family to Sallie (McCorkle) Wood. The land excluded the home place of the Haynes family. Sallie did not register her deed at the Grundy County courthouse until February 5, **1935**. A portion of the land is now (**2016**) owned by my family and lies on the eastern side of Pigeon Springs Rd., aka Partins Farm Rd.

Sallie M. Wood placed one hundred dollars into Mr. Norvell's hands and agreed to pay five hundred dollars a year at 6 % interest for the next three years, **1934, 1935, 1936**, bringing the full price to \$1600.00 plus interest. Who was this lady? Whatever possessed a college educated woman to buy land in rural Grundy County just as the Great Depression of **1929** was still disrupting all peoples' lives.

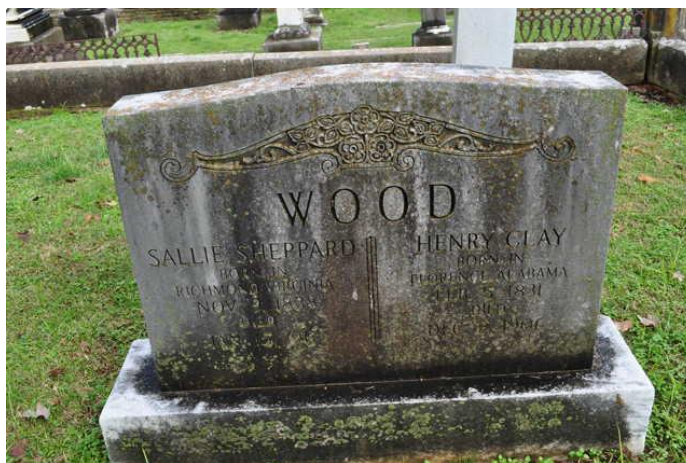
Sallie was born around **1891** in Fayetteville, TN. She was the daughter of Arthur Alexander McCorkle and Ida (Stephens) McCorkle, born in West Virginia and Tennessee respectively. Her father was an assistant general manager at a coal company in **1910**, and he was a farmer in **1920**. Arthur had the enormously taxing job as warden for the State Penitentiary in Davidson County as early as **1924** when he signed the death certificate for Thomas Edgar "Edd" McFarland of Monteagle, TN. (Edd died in prison as a result of an old wound from his attempted suicide after he had murdered his wife two years earlier.) Through the military life of Sallie's paternal grandfather, John

McCorkle, she was able to become a member of the “Daughters of the Revolution.” Ensign John McCorkle was in Capt. James Gilmore’s Company (1776). Ensign McCorkle was mortally wounded at the Battle of Cowpens in South Carolina on **Jan. 17, 1781**. He was born in Rockbridge Co., VA and died in New Guilford Court House, N. C.



Sallie McCorkle’s parents’ double stone in the Willow Mount Cemetery in Shelbyville, TN

On **June 24, 1914**, in Bedford Co., TN, Sallie married an older man, William Sheppard Wood. Sheppard (as we shall call him) was born in **1875** in Florence, AL. His parents were Henry Clay Wood and Sallie E. (Sheppard) Wood, born in Alabama and Virginia respectively. Their double stone below is in the Florence Cemetery in Lauderdale Co., AL.



Henry Clay Wood (Feb. 5, 1831 – Dec. 2, 1906); Sallie Sheppard Wood (1838-1917)

In **1916** William and Sallie Wood welcomed their first child, Sallie Sheppard Wood, into their family. In **1918** a son, William McCorkle Wood, was born. Both children were born in Kentucky. In **1918** Sheppard registered for the WWI Draft while in Harlan, KY. He listed his occupation as coal operator for himself. This interest in coalmining may give us a hint that Sallie met William through her father's work in coalmining. By **1920**, Sheppard, Sallie and their two young children had moved back to Shelbyville, Bedford County next door to Sallie's parents. Sheppard's occupation was still listed as a coal operator. He may well have taken over the work for his father-in-law allowing him to do take on the job as Warden of the State Penitentiary in Nashville where he worked until his death. Surprisingly, in **1930**, he and Sallie owned their own florist. The years **1931** and **1932**, Sallie devoted to her seriously ill father. Her mother had passed away, and Sally stepped in as a dutiful daughter. It was soon after this period that the Wood family story became cloudy.

I have no proof that Sheppard ever came to the plateau with his wife and two teenage children, but I do believe that the efforts undertaken on Pigeon Springs Rd. warranted the need for a strong, multi-talented man. Locals' stories tell that Sheppard was with his family and did much of the preparations for this new family adventure. A local friend, who has since passed away, had for years told my husband and me the story of a "goat ranch" that once was on the same land we own here. He spoke of the goats, the coal mining, the house building, other farm animals, and farm vehicles.

Below are pictured the foundation cornerstones of the house that was started but never got its roof. Tarps were placed to hold the water out, and that was the way it remained. Remnants of an old chimney once lay with these cornerstones. Minimal prospecting for coal was done, and there is evidence that some coal was removed. Because of William's interest in coal, this hinted to the idea that coal may have brought the family to Grundy County. The story goes on to make the point that the goats weren't just any old goats but Angora goats grown for their wool and not for meat. Chickens and rabbits also were a part of the menagerie. Older ones told of all the cages and pens that surrounded the *to-be* homestead.



The Wood family's house foundation stones above were gathered together on the flat rock by my husband for safe keeping.

Sallie was an only child, so when her father Arthur died in **1932**, in his will he left everything he had to her. Sallie had moved into her father's home at the prison for the last year of his life and was a constantly helpful daughter helping her father through his illness. Sometime between **1930** and **1933**, Sheppard and Sallie divorced. My reason for this statement is noticing that Sallie Wood bought the land with no mention of Sheppard's name on the deed. Also on William Sheppard Wood's death certificate, it is stated that his marital status was "divorced", but Sallie was listed as his wife. And lastly, when each passed, the burials were in different states not side by side as one would expect.

On **April 1, 1935**, Sallie and the children were living in Altamont, TN. Sallie had never registered her deed obtained in **1933** from the Norvells, nor had she made the \$500.00 yearly payment for **1934, 1935 and 1936**. On **June 12, 1936**, while still living in Altamont, she was forced to render a quit claim deed, but not until she received her \$100.00 down payment paid in **1933**. Sallie had two children to put through college, so I am supposing every penny counted.

On **July 23, 1940**, William Sheppard Wood died in Jonesboro, Washington County, TN, after a short stay in the hospital. For eight years he had suffered with rheumatoid arthritis and near the end of his life he had pneumonia. Alexander Hamilton Wood, his brother, was the informant on Sheppard's death certificate. He was buried in the Gunnings Cemetery, Row 12, Grave 5, in Sullivan Co., TN where his brother Alexander H. Wood was also later buried in **1966**.

Ernest Campbell "E. C." Norvell died on **Dec. 28, 1941**. This caused his wife, Eda B. (Von Bergen) Norvell, to take on his bookkeeping. She found buyers for the goat ranch land in Mr. W. V. Tolbert and his wife, Cecil Tolbert. On **May 22, 1942**, off to the courthouse Eda went to register the quit claim deed of **1936**. The next day **May 23** the Tolberts registered their deed. The land and all that the Wood family may have left behind cost the Tolberts \$700.00, a difference of \$1000.00 less than what Sallie would have paid had she seen fit to do so.

Speaking of what Sallie left behind here on Pigeon Springs Rd., the picture painted by local talk and my husband's elders: the doors on all cages were flung open; the chickens had a party until nightfall when the foxes, owls and coyotes came out to play, and of course, there were several hungry folks living along Pigeon Springs Rd. who would have relished chicken or goat stew for dinner or nightly supper. The goats were released to tangle their wool in the briar patches and later to have their throats cut, skin removed, and roasted over an open fire. Rabbits hopped ever so joyfully around the wooded area making wonderful meals for "whoever or whatever got there first". Even an old coal truck was left on the side of the old slate road possibly there because the axle had broken or some other mechanical problem had wreaked havoc on it.

Where there is smoke, there is fire. Sallie didn't keep the embers stoked long enough to make a home in Grundy County. She and the children were living in Center Town, Cherokee County, Alabama in **1939** where her son William was working as an electrician. Sallie died **Oct. 17, 1942**, at the age of fifty-one in Gadsen, Etowah County, Alabama. Her body was brought back to her beloved Shelbyville, TN for burial in the Willow Mount Cemetery, Range 7 next to her parents, Arthur Alexander and Ida (Stephens) McCorkle. On Sallie's lone stone, along with her name and dates, are those of her two children: William McCorkle Wood and Sallie Sheppard Wood. I assume that there may be some cremations here, but I don't have that information. I also assume that the daughter never married; this may also be true of the son.



The front of the stone: Sallie McCorkle Wood (Nov. 7, 1890-Oct. 18, 1942)



On top is her son's data: William McCorkle Wood (Mar. 4, 1918-July 27, 1969).



On back of the stone is her daughter's data: Sallie Sheppard Wood (Aug. 2, 1916—June 13, 2000).

This last day of August **2016**, I gave to Sallie. Realizing that I don't have her full story, the least I could do was drive to her burial site in Shelbyville and clean the mowed grass from her stone with my hand. Writing this little bit of Grundy County history cleaned one more spot on my mental shelf. Possibly no one cares about the goat ranch, but just maybe some relative, somewhere, does.

And what about those Seagroves graves out Clouse Hill toward the Payne's Cove bluff. Has everyone forgotten about them?

Find me at jackiepartin@blomand.net