

“Can These Bones Live?”

A Talk with Albert Hugh “Hooty” Knight

Written by Jackie Layne Partin

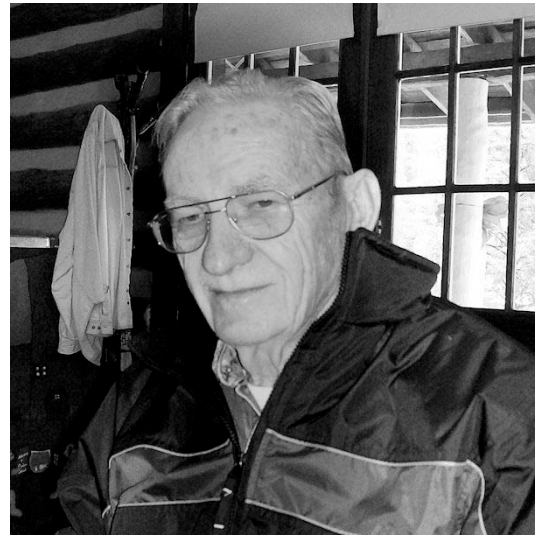
2009

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The setting, the Beersheba Springs Library, was fitting for our talk. The log structure was built in 1923 by **Henry Brown**, and has its own history, but the history of the Savage Gulf was foremost in my mind. The librarian, **Melissa (Knight) Scruggs** was my contact with the “real” Gulf—the one before the State of Tennessee became the owner of the majority of the land. Recently I had made my own journey down into the “Valley of Dry Bones.” The lonely chimneys, the dry riverbeds, the empty school foundation, the cemeteries and the remnants of an old log cabin were bones strewn about the floor of the wilderness. They were the only remains of the living, thriving “culture” that once existed in that area. On April 22, 2009, I found a way to bring life to those dry bones by talking with Melissa’s father, **Albert Hugh “Hooty” Knight**, who spent the first eleven years of his life in that habitat that he so dearly loves. God once asked the prophet Ezekiel, “Can these bones live?” I reasoned, “Probably not—not in the state that Hooty enjoyed!” However, by hearing his stories and those of others, the bones came to life in my mind. By coupling their stories and my research on the families, I hope I can bring them to life again in the mind of the reader.

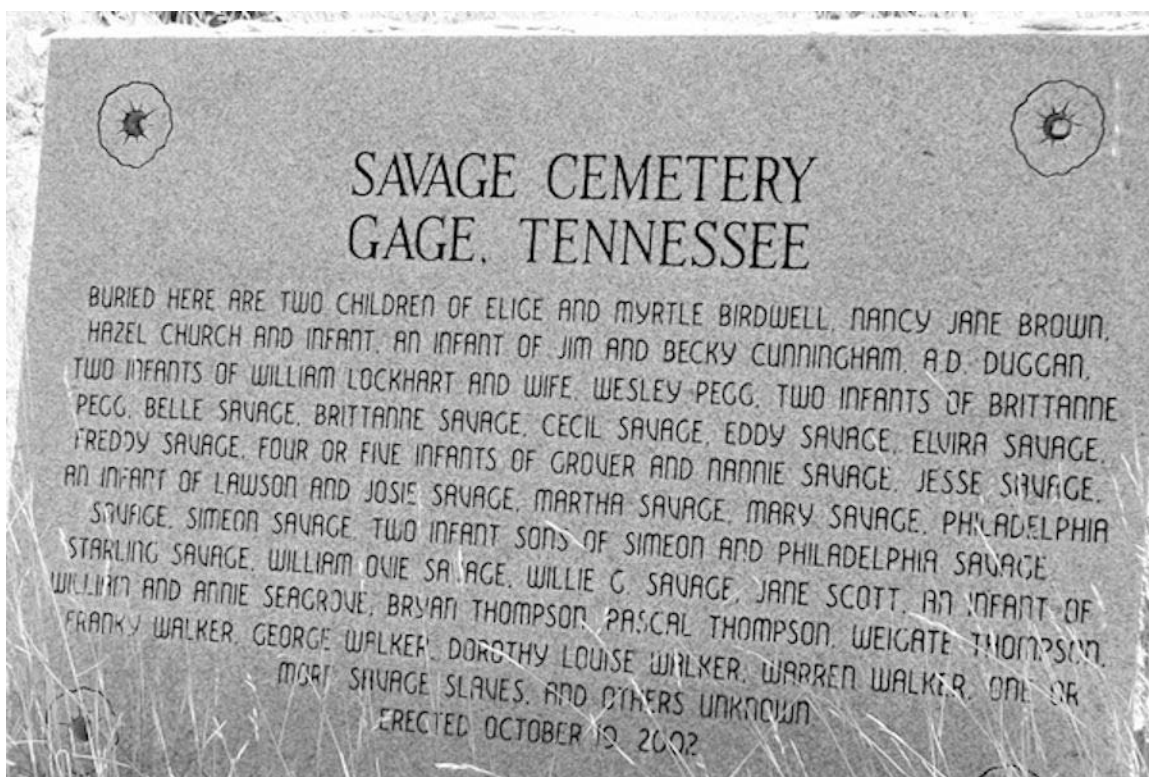


Albert Hugh (Hooty) Knight

Grundy County rests largely on one of the most beautiful plateaus in the Cumberland Mountains. Even the parts of the county that flow, like lava from a volcano, off into the valleys on their way to the county lines contribute to the beauty of the county. When I stand at either Warren’s Point or Million Dollar View in Monteagle and look out over Pelham Valley, I am awe stricken. I grew up running along the rims of those beautiful bluffs, stopping occasionally to pick a handful of huckleberries or to peer over the edges wondering if I could possibly survive should I fall off into the treetops below. Tarlton Valley below Beersheba Springs is a part of the county with which I have lately become quite familiar. While standing on the well-chosen hill whereon the quiet, peaceful dead of the King Cemetery lie, wonderment fills my heart as I scan across the valley and fix my eyes upon the mountainous horizon. No matter where I am in the county, there is beauty to behold. It is completely engulfed with mysterious caves, hidden coves, sheer cliffs, stony creeks, lonely

hollows, man-made lakes, mountainous peaks, perpetual springs, fertile valleys, beautiful waterfalls and huge gulfs. The following tales are about one of those vast gulfs, Savage Gulf, which lies on the western edge of the Cumberland Plateau.

Just off Highway 399 on Stocker Road in Sequatchie County, lies a piece of land full of history from Grundy County's past. The Alfred Stocker family has the pleasure, if not the honor, of living on the original home site of the Savage family for whom the Gulf was named. What a beautiful farm, and with what passionate care it is tended! The creek that runs through the middle of the farm is rightly named Savage Creek. At one time the Gage, Tennessee Post Office and a stagecoach station stood alongside the old stage road that climbed right behind the Savage home.



Savage Cemetery Marker – Stocker Farm

Savage Cemetery rests high on the hill near where the old farmhouse used to stand and is a silent testimony of those who cleared the wilderness and sculpt and molded their lives out of the land. As the Psalmist said, "There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard." And the message is always the same whether it is high upon the mountain or low in the valley. As I climbed the hills to get to the neatly kept, burial ground, which was blanketed with bird's-foot violets, my mind went back to a movie, "The Thorn Birds," that I had seen some years ago. In that movie, on several occasions, the family who owned the land made the long trek, one behind the other, all behind the coffin, uphill to the family

cemetery. Likewise, some Savages, some neighbors, some relatives, some slaves, and others all made their trips up to that high knoll overlooking the headwaters of the Savage Gulf to return their loved ones' bodies to the earth. Let's go back in time and follow some of those families as they took their places in the history of Grundy County.

We have the colony/state of Georgia to thank for the wonderful Knight families who inhabited the beautiful Gulf. **Richard Knight** and his wife **Ellender** were born in the colony of Georgia long before it became, in 1788, the fourth state to ratify the United States of America's constitution. They had a son named **William Knight**, born around 1785, who became the progenitor of the Knights in the Gulf. The Knight family became friends with **Sterling Savage, Jr.** who became the progenitor of the Savage families in the Gulf. It was the relationship between these two families that, down the road of time, brought us these wonderful, old stories from the Gulf.

The Savage family heritage is connected with the North Carolina "Hill" families. Hugh Lawson White Hill (b. ca. 1810) wrote in an autobiography that his father **Henry John Alexander Hill** (b. ca. 1774) married his mother, **Susannah (Swales) Savage** (b. ca. 1767) in Edgecombe County, North Carolina. Hugh also wrote that his mother had previously married Sterling Savage, and they had had one child together. It is generally accepted that Sterling already had children from a previous marriage, and two of those were sons, **Sterling Savage, Jr.** (b. ca. 1780) and **Jesse Savage** (b. ca. 1785). Sterling, Sr. died around 1794 leaving Susannah with his children and their own child to rear on her own. Being a young woman with the responsibility of young children, Susannah wisely accepted the marriage proposal of Henry J. A. Hill in 1796 and began a new life with him. She was older than her new husband, but Henry was a hard worker and full of ambition—just the traits Susannah needed in a husband at that time in her life. In the 1800 Census record for Edgecombe County, North Carolina, I found a Henry Hill family recorded. There were three males under ten years of age, (*possibly Ervin, Asa and Isaac Hill*), three males between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five, (*possibly Sterling, Jr. and Jesse Savage, and their stepfather Henry J. A. Hill*), one female under ten, (*possibly Brittania Savage – half-sister to Sterling and Jesse*) and one female between sixteen and twenty-five (*possibly Susannah (Swales, Savage) Hill*) in the household. If that is the right family, then the record does not agree with Susannah's birth being around 1767. I will leave all that hard work of sorting out "who's who" to the seasoned researchers.

Soon after the turn of the century, *Henry J. A. Hill, Susannah* and her new children, *Ervin, Isaac and Asa Hill*, and her one child by Sterling Savage, *Brittania*, moved to Hancock County, Georgia. Susannah's stepsons, *Sterling, Jr. and Jesse*, obviously made the move with the family. Henry's father, **Isaac Hill**, and his mother, **Lucinda (Wallace) Hill**, came along to keep the extended family intact. Since many in the Hill families were involved in the

collecting of pine resin from which to distill turpentine, and in building tar kilns to run tar, one wonders if those were the reasons for the move to Georgia where pine trees were plentiful. Of course, we must remember that states were being added to the *United States*, and the Indian lands were being “gobbled up” by the “white man.” Expansion was inevitable; the pioneers wanted to venture into the once impossible-to-own Indian lands. In 1796, Tennessee had become a ratified state, so it began to fill with pioneers from Virginia, North Carolina, Georgia and the other colonies. After a couple of years, Henry moved his family to an area in White County, Tennessee, which soon became known as Hills Creek in Warren County. He left his parents behind, but they moved on to Jasper County, Georgia, where his mother later died. His father, Isaac Hill, then married **Lydia (White) Hill**. Later, they also made the move to Tennessee to be with their families.

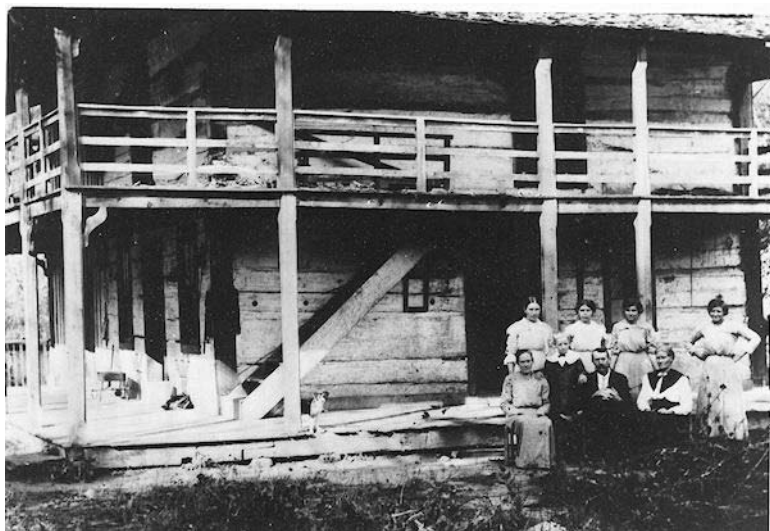
Sterling Savage, Jr. had his eyes on a young woman in Hancock County, so he lingered behind. He had met a very young **Martha Pope** (b. ca. 1790) and married her around 1807. They became the parents of Martha (b. ca. 1809), better known as “Patsy,” and several other children. Though there may have been miles between neighbors, Sterling’s family became friends with the **Richard Knight** family mentioned in the beginning of our story. Some time between 1814 and 1820, Sterling finally decided to follow his stepmother, Susannah Hill, to Warren County, Tennessee. All the family belongings were packed for the move. Whether **William Knight** came with the Savage family, or came later, is not known, but he also made the move. Sterling’s one daughter at the time, Patsy, was much too young for William to have shown an interest in her back in Georgia, but “thank Heaven, for little girls; they grow up in the most delightful ways!” As early as 1824, Sterling Savage, Jr. was on the Warren County tax rolls, and acquired thousands of acres of land over the next decade.

On March 06, 1828, in Warren County, Tennessee, **William Knight and Martha “Patsy” Savage** became husband and wife. The young couple settled in the area of Warren County that would, in 1844, become part of the newly formed Grundy County. Patsy’s parents and siblings were already nestled in that vast wilderness of virgin timber. Now we have forever tied the Savages and Knights together in the huge gulf where they built their cabins and reared their families. They were completely surrounded by watersheds from the plateau, but there were large sinks that took some of the waters underground and surfaced again down in the valley. That gulf would soon become known as Savage Gulf, named for the Sterling Savage, Jr. family. This history is the beginning of the Savage and Knight families who sprinkled themselves from the eastern edge of Grundy County, down into the depth of the Gulf and eventually out onto the top of the plateau at Beersheba Springs.

When Sequatchie County was formed in 1857, the county line took in the part of Grundy County where Sterling Savage, Jr. first settled his family high on those hills. Sterling, Jr. lived

in three Tennessee counties, Warren, Grundy and Sequatchie, and never moved an inch. Well, actually his farm never moved; three years before Sequatchie County was formed, Sterling, Jr. had moved on to meet his Maker. For more information on the original home site of Sterling Savage, Jr., please read, "Father Always Carried a Gun Under His Coat," the Norma Mae (Sitz) Stocker story which will soon be on the following site: www.grundycountyhistory.org.

Sterling, Jr. and Martha (Pope) Savage's family had grown from the five children, **Samuel Pope, Martha Patsy, Warren, Jesse and Simmon**, born in Hancock County, Georgia, to eight when **Brittana, Lucinda and Frances** came into the family in Warren Co., Tennessee. On Oct. 29, 1854, in Grundy County, Samuel Pope Savage married his first cousin, **Beersheba Savage**, daughter of **Jesse Savage**. Samuel took his bride to the Savage Gulf to live. His father died earlier that same year and had left him a piece of land in the Gulf.



Samuel Pope Jr. & Lou Verna (Tate) Savage Family

Samuel hired **John J. Tate** to build a house for his new wife. The hand-hewn logs came from the virgin hardwoods, and probably some pine, which were taken from the area. The house was built not too far from the Collins River near a spring where Coppinger Gulf joins Savage Creek. Samuel, Sr. and Beersheba reared three children, **Angeline**, born 1856, **Decator** born 1858 and **Samuel, Jr.** born 1862, in their new house.

In 1885, **Samuel Pope Savage, Jr.** married **Lou Vernia Tate**, the granddaughter of John J. Tate. They had ten children, but only five lived until adulthood. The five small children who died were buried in the Savage Cemetery on the farm owned by **Alfred and Norma Stocker**. Samuel Savage, Jr. died Sept. 09, 1900, from a logging accident. He was buried in the cemetery above the old schoolhouse at the foot of Schoolhouse Gulf. His father, Sam, Sr. died the next year, and he was laid to rest beside his son. Sam, Jr.'s wife, Lou Vernia, was left with five young children and living in a rough wilderness. **Elizabeth Tate** moved in to help with her grandchildren. The oldest, Bessie, was thirteen, and the youngest, Sam, was seven months old. She continued to live in the house until 1910 when she moved with her four remaining children, **Willie, Johnny, Vernie and Sam**, to Kimberly, Idaho. After she left, Jesse Savage of Cookeville, Tennessee, lived in the house with his parents until 1917. In 1991, he

recalled that the house was about a mile north up the road from the schoolhouse. He noted that one needed to bear a little to the right at the foot of the mountain to find the site where the house once stood.

In 1917, the house was sold to John Creighton. **Vernie Mitchell** lived in the home after the Savages moved. Vernie said the oldest cemetery was up a hill above the spot where **Elizabeth Tate's** house was located, about three or four hundred yards up the main road from the Savage house. **Samuel Savage, Jr.** had the house built for his mother-in-law on his land. The old cemetery was east toward Coppinger Gulf, right at the fork. Knights and Savages have stones there with inscriptions scratched by hand or carved on the stones. (Note: *We are thankful to Dennis A. Tate for use of his material in describing this Savage family house, its inhabitants and surroundings.*)

Sam Pope Savage, Sr.'s son **Decator** married **Fannie Jane Tate** and had four living children in 1900. They were Floyd, Gracie, Barsha and James. Sam, Sr. was widowed at the time and was living with his son in the Gulf. Decator was a farmer, but his neighbor, German immigrant, **Fred Schwoon**, took advantage of the huge timber business. There seemed to be two lines of work for the inhabitants of the Gulf—timber and farming. Remnants of the Decator Savage log house are still standing in a cleared meadow in what is now a part of the South Cumberland Recreation Area in Grundy County. From the looks of the pile of stone and rubble, the log house was not just a one-room building. The parks system renders wonderful care to the remnants and the surrounding area.

Going back to **William and Patsy (Savage) Knight**, records show that they started a family that eventually included these children: **Dolphin Lindsey Alexander Knight** (b. 1829), **Sarah H. Knight** (b. 1832), **Martha E. Knight** (b. 1833) and **Sterling Knight** (b. 1836). William Knight died four years after the birth of his last son. His sons, Dolphin and Sterling, went on to marry and rear their families in the area. In 1850, a teenage boy, **Thomas Dugan**, was living with Sterling, Jr. and Martha Savage. Their widowed daughter, Martha/Patsy Knight, and her four children were living next door. Young Thomas Dugan married Patsy's daughter, Sarah Knight, in Grundy County on Jan. 01, 1852. Eight years later, **Sarah (Knight) Dugan** and her brother Sterling were living next door to their mother Patsy, but Thomas was not in the picture. Had he passed away, or had they divorced? Thomas may have died, but it was not unheard of for a divorce to happen, even back then. Sarah lived on with her mother and probably never married again. I can find no record of her sister, Martha E. Knight, ever marrying or showing up on the Census records; she may have died young.

For the Savage Gulf lines of Knights, let us follow the two sons of William and Patsy. First, **Dolphin Lindsey Alexander Knight** married **Sarah Jane O'Rear** on Jan. 17, 1854 in

Warren County, Tennessee. They became the parents of Joseph Warren, Sarah, James Calvin, Starling, Martha, Dolphin Levander, Lucretia (may also be called Annie), Mary and George. For the purpose before us, let's follow **Dolphin Levander Knight's** line. Levander's first wife was Mary Franzina Hobbs; they became the parents of Dolphin Alex, George, **Albert Conry**, Osha, Mary Hester, Vernie, Gates and Sally Knight. The second marriage of Dolphin L. A. Knight was to Phoebe James on July 11, 1907 in Grundy County. Together they had two children – Robert and Henry Knight who both died as young boys.

Dolphin Levander Knight's son, **Albert Conry** (born Feb. 14, 1894) married **Bernice Miller** on Dec. 25, 1919 in Grundy County. After Albert's mother, Mary Franzina, died in 1903, he lived part of the time in the Gulf and part of the time with relatives in Coalmont, which is where he met Bernice. The young couple walked down an old road that came off the side of the mountain from Coalmont and spent their honeymoon night with the Decator Savage family in the Gulf. The two families were good friends. Fiddle playing and dancing were popular means of celebration when there was a marriage. No doubt, the old log house rang out with laughter; don't forget that it was Christmas night, so the table was spread with the best of wintertime foods. Bernice was born a "Miller," but one day around 1910, when she was about six years of age, her father mounted his horse with his young daughter in hand and rode off to **Thomas Newton** and **Mary Curley's** house. Bernice was left with the Curleys and would never see her father again. In later years, a grave was found in Crossville, Tennessee, for Bernice's biological mother, **Mary Jane Davis** who had died in 1903, the same year that Bernice was born. As far as anyone can tell at the present, the Curleys were no kin to the Miller family. At one time, they lived in Coalmont next door to Joseph Warren Knight, Albert's uncle, which may have been how the young couple came to know each other. After Newt died, Mary lived a lot of the time with Albert and Bernice. She made a wonderful mother for Bernice and a super grandmother to Bernice's children: Mary Lucille, Vernie E., William Dennis, Horace Newton, **Albert Hugh**, Josephine, and Georgia Pauline. Mary Lucille died young and is buried in Savage Gulf.

Their son **Albert Hugh Knight**, or Hooty as most people call him, was born May 23, 1930. As a young schoolboy, he was nicknamed "**Hooty**" by one of his teachers, **Adolphus "Dolph" Rollins**. Mr. Rollins said that Hooty sat in a tree and hooted like an owl. The name was fitting for the young boy. And young he was when he started to school in the Gulf. In order to keep the numbers up for the county and keep the school open, in 1934, Hooty was allowed to begin his education at the ripe old age of four. He liked school, and being younger than his peers didn't bother him a bit.



Savage Gulf School
The Year before Hooty Entered School

Joe B. Tate was the oldest student, so he took on the responsibility of taking young Hooty home after school. Joe was so big and Hooty so small that when Joe took off running through the woods, little Hooty was literally lifted off the ground. It was sort of like when as a child, I played “airplane” with an older child, and one arm and one leg was grasped, my body lifted from the ground and then flown around and around by the other child. The only difference was that

Joe only held little Hooty’s arm causing him to sail around in the air.

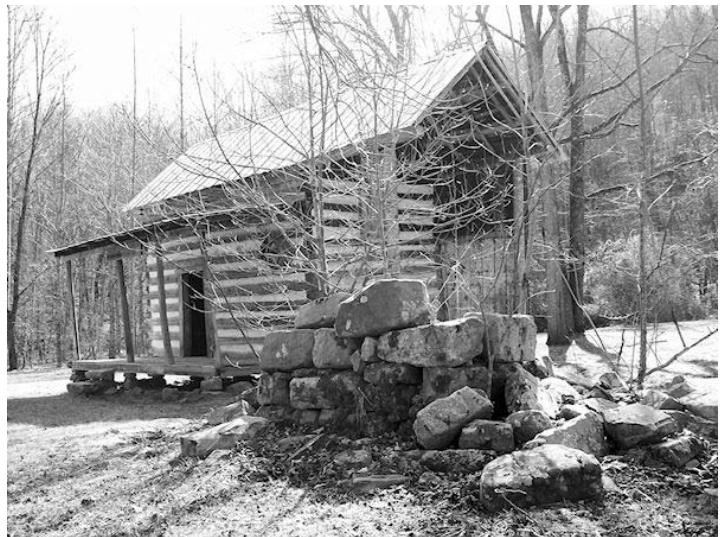
Those were happy, fun-filled days for Hooty, romping the great wilderness with **George Green, Homer and Alfred Knight, and Ray, Hershel and Bill Tate**. Throughout the years, the area was full of children from the Knight, Tate, Green, Madewell, Hobbs, Evans, King, Savage and several other families. There were just about as many creeks to jump as there were families in the area—Coppinger Creek, John Savage Creek, Stone Door Creek, Horse Pound Creek and Big Creek, to name a few. Even though we speak of the whole area as being “Savage Gulf,” there were several gulfs with all their creeks that came together to form a wonderland for the children to explore. A few trips were made with **E. H. Barker**, a teacher, to McMinnville to see a movie. Hooty and his siblings walked out of the Gulf to attend church services at the Panhandle Baptist Church that had also been used as a school. Hooty stated that going to church was fun; what a wonderful thought!

Dolph Rollins’ sister **Rachel** was also one of Hooty’s teachers. **Martha (Hobbs) Coppinger** taught Hooty’s father and his aunts and uncles. Martha married **Gilbert Coppinger** and lived over close to the county line, but she rode her horse up the valley and into the Gulf to the little school. **Mackie Brown, Eller Etta Smith, Madge (Warren) Anderson, Lora Killian, E. H. Barker, Edna (Wimberly) Barker, Francis (Tate) Layne and Myrtle Dykes** also taught at different times throughout the life of the school. We know that there were teachers in the early years of the school whose names may be lost to us. From a letter below, we can see that the school was built sometime during the 1890’s and before 1900, the year that its builder died. **Isabel Scruggs** walked from her home in Tarlton, and she was the last teacher the little school would have. When some of the Knights moved out of the Gulf, there weren’t enough students to keep the school open. The foundation stones, a

U. S. Benchmark, stories, photographs and memories are all that's left to remind Grundy County that there was once a school in that deep wilderness.

If Hooty's memory serves him correctly, the little frame building had three windows down each side. The children always arrived before the teacher; they gathered the wood for the stove, built a big fire and had the school as warm as possible when the teacher arrived. Once, Hooty noticed that the fire got out around the flue, and being somewhat bashful and not full of gab, he hesitated, but soon told **Hershel Tate** that "the house" was on fire. The teacher was told, and the bucket brigade began. The children ran to the well near the Schoolhouse Cemetery and a nearby spring to get water. Then they climbed to the roof with the water and threw enough down the sides of the chimney to put out the fire.

"**Hooty**, what about the flood waters, did they ever get to the school?" I asked. He said that folks in the gulf knew when the waters were going to rise, so the children were dismissed and "headed for home." The waters were worse in the winter months. Sometimes it was days before the water went down enough for the students to traverse the foot logs that had to be crossed. Their mothers met them at the logs to keep a watchful eye upon their crossings. Ironically, none of the mothers could swim. Hooty chuckled when he told that fact about the mothers. Of course, I assured him, that mothers would jump right in to save their babies even though their own lives might be lost. That's just what mothers do! Once Hooty and his brother went hunting up near the Decator Savage cabin which was occupied at the time by the Wheeler Perry family. The water came up so fast that the two boys could not get back home, so they spent the night with the Perrys. From time to time, teachers and other visitors had to do the same. The Gulf was full of hospitable people. Thankfully, the little school building was never damaged by the floodwaters that crashed down from the plateau. It took a bulldozer, sometime in the 1950's, to destroy the little school that had faithfully served the children of the Gulf all those years. Hooty believes it was pushed down so that the land would go back to the owner; once it ceased to be used for a school, then the land was reclaimed.



Site of the 'Cator Savage Cabin
Fireplace Stones in Foreground

The following is an interview from the past with **Mrs. Eller Etta Smith**, a former schoolteacher at the Gulf. (*Again we thank Dennis A. Tate for this most informative material.*)

“Samuel Savage, Jr. built the schoolhouse so that his children and the other children in Savage Gulf could get an education. ‘I began teaching at the old Savage Gulf School in 1905. I remember well my first day there. I rode a horse into the Gulf. The horse could scarcely stand on the boulders in the road. When I arrived at the school, I found it to be padlocked. The families had crossed up; (they) just couldn’t get along, so they closed the school. The people thought that getting a teacher from outside the community would help ease the tensions; that’s why I was there.’

*‘My first order of business was to find someone to unlock the school. I later acquired a bell on credit, **(Dennis A. Tate note – The bell is atop the Nazarene Church in Palmer, TN at this time.)** I did not know how I was going to pay for the bell, so I came upon the idea of charging twenty-five cents to let anyone ring it. I remember Martha Knight insisted on ringing the bell anytime of day when she donated her quarter – to ring out her money’s worth, I guess.’*

*‘The school building consisted of one room with a small addition, which the pupils used for a lunchroom. I had eleven students. I can’t remember all of their names, but there were Evans, Knight, Savage and King children in my school. **(Dennis A. Tate’s note: Lou Vernie Savage, my Mother was one of the students, as well as, John Savage and later Samuel Savage III. Also, William Savage and Barsha (Bessie Savage). I have a picture of the children who went to the school in our files).** Homer Evans and Hill King used to fight constantly. I had to send them home one day because they got so muddy.’*

*‘The families living in the community logged, farmed and generally lived off the land. Two of the families were Savages. Mr. Cater, (Decator), Savage – the chimney to his house still stands near the Stone Door, and a Savage woman who was widowed. I never did know her husband’s name, but she lived right close to where the road goes up to Peak Mountain. **(Denis A. Tate’s note: This was Lou Vernie Savage, my Grandmother; her husband’s name was Samuel Pope Savage, Jr. He was instrumental in getting the schoolhouse built originally, and since he had a logging operation, he cut the logs and hauled them to the site where the schoolhouse was built. He also did the bulk of the building.)** Mr. Cater, (Decator) Savage had three children in school – two girls and a boy. A Knight family lived there – Martha and Cecil Knight. I had a good friend in Beersheba Springs, Tn., Myrtle Dykes. I used to take the trail up to her house.’*



Joe Hobbs at his home

'There was a lawyer that came to our community during the summer. His name was Gates Thurston. He used to walk from Beersheba Springs to Joe Hobb's place, and they would go into Savage Gulf turkey hunting. They would only kill the frying size turkeys and dry them.

The old stage road goes right by the Savage School house. It was still being used some when I was there, but it was in need of repairs. I understand that it was built by slaves under the direction of H. W. C. Hill. I've heard it called the Kentucky Route. There's another road in that area, the Peak Mountain Road that goes

into Savage Gulf. The Kentucky Road goes on up the mountain and on to Chattanooga. I taught at the Savage school until 1906. I then moved to Curtistown and taught near Camp Four, where the soldiers came up the mountain during the War Between the States.' **(This ends the Tate interview with Ella Etter Smith.)**

Hooty never knew his grandmothers since they both died in 1903. His grandfather, **Dolphin Levander Knight** lived until 1937, so Hooty did have a few years to be with him. Dolphin Levander's son George lived on in his father's house after his death, but Albert Conry Knight, built his family its own house in the Gulf. The income and support for the family came from farming. It was strange for me to understand how one could farm the harsh, stony, flood ravaged land. Hooty reminded me that at one time there were farms all over the floor of the Gulf, but they have since grown up with brush. It wasn't easy for the early pioneers to turn that land into productive farmland, but it was done with hard labor. When the mules ran the plow into a river rock, it was removed and placed into fences or piled for other uses. Once the land was cleared, the rich soils, washed from the mountain above, became good farmland. In later years, Hooty and his sons continued to go down into the Gulf to work the land with mules and sometimes with a tractor.

"Timber" was the great commodity of the Gulf. Several logging companies did their fair share of harvesting the virgin timber of the area. There were houses, churches, schools and businesses to be built in the county. Timber was needed for mining projects; railroads needed crossties; whiskey companies needed staves for their barrels.



Savage Gulf Logging ca 1900

To name a few logging efforts—brothers, **Elmer and George Thompson**, did a lot of logging in the area; Whitson Company cut timber for years; **the Schwoon** family had a logging mill many

years before Hooty’s lifetime. Because of all the logging, there were times and sections of the Gulf that took on the look of a war zone. Hooty’s uncle, **Dolphin Alex Knight**, the last resident of the Gulf, and **Lester Scott** together owned approximately eight hundred acres of land in the Gulf at one time. They eventually sold their land to Whitson Lumber Company who in turn gave the land to the State of Tennessee. **Dock Hobbs**, Alex’s brother-in-law, also made his living selling timber from his land. It would be hard to name all the people who logged in the Gulf. I was interested in who owned the land after it was taken from the Indians. Hooty believes that William Dugan owned much of it including the land that Hooty still owns. Besides timber, there was a little mining going on at the top of the plateau. Sixteen-year-old Hooty and his father worked in those mines at one time. Off Grassy Ridge Road, there were outcroppings of coal. Dynamite was used to loosen the coal for loading; then timbers were placed to support the earth for further diggings. The coal was hauled and sold to the Phipps family in Coalmont.



Logging with a Six Oxen Hitch

Savage Gulf ca 1900

When **Hooty** was eleven years old the family moved out of the Gulf to the Panhandle Community on top of the plateau. I asked Hooty why his family moved. The decision to move was made by his mother after her oldest son became extremely ill with pneumonia, “brain fever,” and other things. For two or three days the child was sick and no doctor could come at the time. When one finally came, he had to cross the creek and got his feet wet. This didn’t set well with the doctor, and the family thought this caused him to be extreme in his

charges for the visit. **Doctors Clark and Harris** were doctors who serviced the area in that time, but Hooty could not remember the doctor's name that came to see his brother. When her son got well enough to make the move, **Bernice Knight** packed the family's belongings and brought them to the top of the mountain. The new home in Beersheba Springs was fine with Hooty, but he missed his life in the Gulf.

There were so many fun things for a young boy to do down there. Thankfully for Hooty and his family, he was able to keep thirty-six acres of land in the Gulf, and that seems only fitting for a man who loved living his youth in the forest. He takes great pleasure in the visits he makes from time to time so as not to lose touch with his roots.



Panhandle School - 1940

Hooty Knight, back row and 3rd from the left

"Did you go to High School?" I asked Hooty. "No," he replied. "Didn't get to go, or didn't want to go?" I quickly asked. "Didn't want to go!" he laughingly responded, "And Dad never made me go!" He had two cousins, **Homer and Anna Knight**, who walked out of the Gulf to the store in Beersheba Springs to meet the school bus on its way to the high school in Tracy City. While still living in the Gulf, Hooty said that two choices for stores were **Claud Coppinger's** store in Beersheba or **Morton Bros & Scruggs Store** in Tarlton. Mounting a horse or mule was the fastest available way to go to either place.



Morton Bros & Scruggs



Claud Coppinger's Store
& Post Office

The unique Peak Mountain and the Stage Road that went up, out and over that "thing," on its way out of Savage Gulf, has always piqued my interest. It just

never seemed to be an appropriate place to ascend the mountain. The stagecoaches traveled from McMinnville to Chattanooga via that route and ran right under the bluff at places. Hooty and his family had walked the area many times. He recalled one story of his great-

grandparents, **Dolphin L. A. and Sarah Jane (O’Rear) Knight** and how during the Civil War, they lived under Peaks Point. Dolphin and Sarah didn’t want anyone to know their family was there. The stagecoach and other travelers could pass within a hundred yards of their “hide out” and never know that they were being watched. The little house they lived in had a thatched roof. On one particular occasion, Sarah Jane was tending to her usual chores around her little abode when suddenly she had an unwelcomed guest, a bear. Sarah was using a pine knot as a light when the bear tore through her house. When the bear opened his mouth wide, Sarah Jane crammed the hot pine knot into its mouth killing the bear. One of my favorite sayings is, “God must have thrown away the mold after He made, in this case, Sarah Jane (O’Rear) Knight!”

Richard Savage, who may well have been one of my college math teachers, lived in the Gulf at one time, and Hooty took him to the **Tommy Thompson** Rock House, which was at the far side of the Gulf in the main bluff of the plateau. Thomas (Tommy) Thompson, a great outdoorsman and hunter,

was the great-great-grandfather of **Ralph Thompson**, son of **Elmer and Isabel (Scruggs) Thompson**. There were periods when Tommy lived in the rock house for weeks at a time. “Grizzly Adams” had nothing on Tommy. Like Coca Cola, he was “the real thing!” While he was gone from



Tommy Thompson



150 year old Basket
Woven by Tommy Thompson

home, he wasn’t whiling away his time. He was hunting for meat and furs, and it didn’t make much difference what kind of meat or furs he trapped. Stories handed down say that Tommy went to Big Bear Cave and reach inside to get a feel for the hibernating bear’s position. When he found the right spot, he stuck the bear with his knife, dragged him out and dressed him for the meat and fur. After a bountiful supply of meats were gathered, Tommy came down to a bluff near his home in Tarlton and raised the white flag yelling, “Meat aplenty, meat aplenty!” Folks from all over saddled up their mules and horses and headed for “Tommy’s Outdoor Meat Market.” Deer, turkey, rabbit, squirrel – whatever your taste buds wanted and your wallet could afford, Tommy had it.

When I was a child, my “Pop,” Alex Layne, or my mother, Clara Layne, rose early each morning and made the short walk to the barn to milk the cow. That’s a job that just couldn’t be “put on the back burner,” which is exactly where I wanted my little pan of milk to be placed as soon as Mama strained it through a cloth. The old wood stove kept the temperature of the milk as warm as it was when the old cow gave it up. That was the only way I would ever drink milk. When progress was made and Kelly Partin’s Dairy in Monteagle delivered cold milk to our front door, I stopped drinking milk, and have never drunk it since. Like my mother had done many times, **Bernice Knight** carried her bucket out to the barn to milk the cow, and as she left the stall, the cow ran toward her. Thinking nothing of it at the time, she served the fresh milk to her large family. Later when the cow was found lying down and not moving at all, the family thought she was dead. **Dr. Upton Beall Bowden** came and declared her to be rabid; thus, she was killed. Albert Conry, Bernice, Granny Curley and all six children had to take fourteen shots each, one per day, in the pit of their stomachs. Dr. Bowden came for about three days to give the shots and to train **David and Randall Coppinger**, sons of **Claud**, to give the shots to the Knights. Hooty thought for sure the needles were as big as match sticks, and probably were. We know from past stories that the shots were extremely painful, but they were necessary to save lives.

Bernice was a homemaker. She made the garden with the help of her children while her husband worked. She was prepared when times got hard; her cellar was full of home-canned foods; for example, there were three or four hundred jars of blueberries and blackberries. The homestead had cows, mules, pigs and chickens. Although the depression years were hard on the family, Hooty believes that overall the family “lived pretty good.” He helped his grandmother pluck the geese for their feathers to use in the feather mattresses. Granny Curley tucked the defiant goose’s head under her armpit and plucked away while the old bird squawked to no avail. Finally when “she had given all that she could,” she was released. Granny Curley could plow behind a mule or chop wood just like a man. She didn’t trust electrical power, so she read her Bible at night with the aid of a flashlight. Piles of used batteries outside her home were evidence of that. She was a lot of help to **Bernice** and **Albert Conry**. Hooty thought his adopted grandmother was the greatest; his biological grandmothers could not have been better to him.

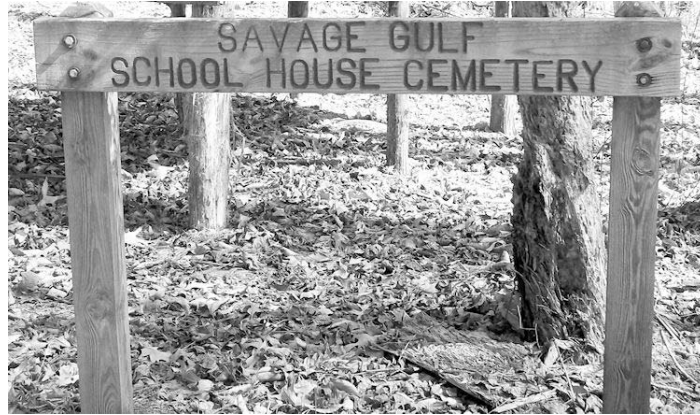
Returning to **William and Patsy Knight’s** lastborn son, Sterling D. Knight (*probably Sterling Commodore Knight*), let’s take a look at his family’s presence in the area. On July 09, 1863, Sterling married **Minerva Hobbs**, daughter of **Adrian and Deida (Smartt) Hobbs**. To this union were born three children, **George, Laura Elizabeth and William Harris Knight**. Evidently, Minerva died between 1870 and 1877, at which time Sterling married **Mahala Emeline O’Rear**, a sister to his sister-in-law **Sarah Jane (O’Rear) Knight**. Sarah and Mahala were daughters of another Warren County family, **Calvin and Edy O’Rear**. Ancestors of the

O'Rears lived at one time in Hancock County, Georgia, so maybe they were friends of the Knights and Savages from way back then. Sterling and Mahala became parents of three children: **Calvin, Martha Edith and Sarah.**

Calvin Knight married **Margaret Gross.** His sister, **Martha Edith,** married **Joseph William Anderson;** they were the grandparents of Tracy City's **Carl Conry.** **Sarah Knight** married **Amos Hargis,** and became the parents of **James Edwin, William Adolphus "Dolph," Emily Juanita, Carl Hobart and Howard Kenneth Hargis.** Most in the county will remember "**Dolph**" **Hargis** as being the Grundy County Road Commissioner for several years. After Sterling's death, **Mahala,** or Hailey, as she was better known, lived in Tracy City with her daughter **Sarah Hargis.** Sarah's mother and husband died, leaving her with all the small children to rear on her own. **William Adolphus "Dolph" Hargis** and his son **Billy** had looked in the Gulf for a long time for their ancestors' graves. Hooty was called in to help them find the tiny graveyard, but at first he could not. But in 1973, he finally found it. It had been bulldozed right through the center to make a logging road. Hopefully, it was an honest mistake on the loggers' part since the markers were fieldstones and the underbrush probably covered the graves. It was difficult to spot. Hooty marked it well so that Dolph and Billy Hargis, and Carl Conry could be shown the burial ground of their ancestors.

Anyone who knows me knows that I like to talk, but I also like to listen to those old stories that will soon be forgotten unless Hooty and I get them told and recorded. Our visit concluded with "just one more story." Hooty's father, **Albert Conry Knight,** had an uncle who lived in Georgia. Around 1910 when Albert was about sixteen-years-old, he took a yoke of oxen and went down to Georgia, loaded up his uncle and the family, and brought them back to Grundy County. What a challenge for such a young boy! I wonder how many sixteen-year-old boys today (2009) could even get the yoke on a set of oxen! In 1951, **Albert Hugh "Hooty" Knight** took his bride-to-be, **Imogene "Jean" Smartt,** to Georgia where they got married. They became the parents of **Estel, Elton, Ricky, Clinton, Melissa and Melody.** Beersheba Springs is fortunate to have these wonderful Knight and Savage descendants in their citizenry. Hooty is happy to walk along the bluffs of the Gulf and reminisce about "old times." There are periods when his heart yearns to "go back home," and that is just what he does – returns to the "Valley of Dry Bones."

Savage Gulf - School House Cemetery



Samuel Pope
Savage, Jr.



L. Warner Brown
Son of A & B Brown



Willie Hobbs



David "Dave" Coppinger



Mary Lucille Knight