

The Life and Death of Alex Benson King of Monteagle – (1874-1912)

Written by Jackie Layne Partin
(A Great-Granddaughter)

Alex Benson King and his wife Mary (A)Thelia (Perry) King came to Monteagle, Tennessee around 1900 from the mountainous region to the east of New Market, Alabama. They had married in Madison County, Alabama on 02 April 1893. Having already lost one child, their second child, Emma Rose King, was born on 04 March 1896. Then on 13 September 1898, another daughter Della Lea King was born. Soon after their move to Monteagle, Alex and Mary lost a set of twins who were buried in the Monteagle Cemetery. (*A simple fieldstone marks their lone grave next to their father.*) They had moved into a small log cabin that sat across the road and up a little ways from the Ben Turner place on Sixth Street. Alex's mother Sarah Catherine (Perry) King was already living in the cabin, so he had family on the mountain to help his wife through her pregnancies and with the care of their girls. Their next daughter Lillie Katherine King was born in that little cabin on 23 April 1903.



Alex Benson and Mary Thelia (Perry) King with daughters (left) Emma Rose and Della Lea (1900)



The Little Cabin on Sixth Street in Monteagle

Below is a Grundy County form filled out on 07 October 1901 for Alex King, which relieved him of his responsibility to work on the public roads that were adjacent to the place he was living. He was also relieved of paying the poll tax necessary for one to vote. The reason given for the indefinite relief was “physical disability.” Alex was my great-grandfather, but I had never heard of any disability that might have brought about such a request. The document points to the fact that Alex and Mary Thelia were in Grundy County by 1901.

STATE OF TENNESSEE Grundy COUNTY.

This is to certify that at the quarterly term of the County Court of Grundy County,
held on the 7th day of October, 1901, it was ordered that

Alex King be relieved of working Public roads
& payment of Poll Taxes
for the term of Indefinitely from said date, on account
of Physical disability

By J. John Scruggs, Clerk.
D. C.

Alex Benson searched for a place to settle his family, and in 1905, he set in motion his efforts to acquire a warranty deed to a small piece of land from F. O. Keith and Maud and G. A. Hunter, (all three heirs of Nellie Keith and Belle M. Keith, wife of F. O. Keith), on the SE corner of King and First Streets. On the west side of the property were neighbors George and Mary King who were not related to Alex Benson; a Fred King, also not a relative, owned the land to the north which became known as part of the land owned by Wilburn Sampley. He and Mary worked hard to pay of the \$275.00 for the land plus 6% interest, and by 1909, they had managed also to pay off a vendor's lien against the property. It appeared that in 1909, God allowed Alex Benson King to plant his feet on firm ground—his own little piece of the earth. What a wonderful feeling for the young couple!

Alex Benson King was born in Warren County, Tennessee on 18 November 1874. His parents were Stephen N. King and Sarah Catherine (Perry) King. His paternal grandparents were Andrew King and Louisa "Lucy" (Russell) King. His maternal grandparents were John Houston Perry, Sr. and Malinda "Linnie" (Dykes) Perry. Mary Thelia Perry, born 08 December 1872, also grew up in the same area of Warren County being the daughter of Isham Perry and Marilda (Hill) Perry. Her paternal grandparents were the same as her husband's maternal grandparents, John and Linnie Perry. This made the young married couple first cousins, but the practice of cousins marrying cousins was common in older days. Her maternal grandparents were Montague Pleasant Hill and Sarah "Sallie" (Taylor) Hill. Mary's parents moved the family to Coalmine/Bice Mountain on the border of Jackson and Madison County in the 1880's. I believe that Alex Benson went with relatives and stayed a time in Alabama, but when his parents moved from the Collins River area to Monteagle, he brought his new family back to Tennessee and came to the mountain also.

On 15 May 1904, Alex Benson wisely became a member of the Woodmen of the World Life Insurance Society. He seemed to be making all the right decisions for his young family.

Although his policy stated that he was thirty-four years old when he joined the Society, he was actually six months shy of his thirtieth birthday. In 1905 he set about building Mary and the children a home of their own on that little corner lot. Mary was a strong, hard-working woman who never gave up in hard times. Most people called her "Aunt Mary" and knew her as being a kind, friendly neighbor.

Form 49.

CLERK'S RECEIPT

WOODMEN OF THE WORLD

No. 149 \$ 140

RECEIVED OF O. B. King

this 22 day of May 1909 One 40/100 DOLLARS,

as follows: For Assessment No. 224

Sovereign Camp Fund,	\$ <u>110</u>
Camp Monthly Dues from.....190	\$ <u>30</u>
Specials,	\$ _____
Total,	\$ <u>140</u>

* If any part of the above amount is paid for the purpose of reinstating the Sovereign so paying, it is received upon the condition and agreement that I receive and hold the same in trust for him, pending the necessary action upon his application for reinstatement and that he has no claim upon the Order until such application is accepted in accordance with the Constitution and Laws. If such application is not accepted the above sum to be refunded.
This Receipt authorizes any Consul Commander to communicate S. A. P. W. to holder thereof.

Julius Stasler CLERK.

Monteagle Camp No. 304 State Tenn.

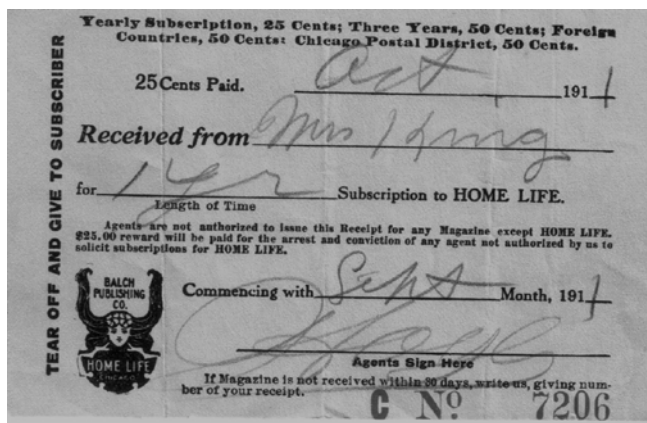
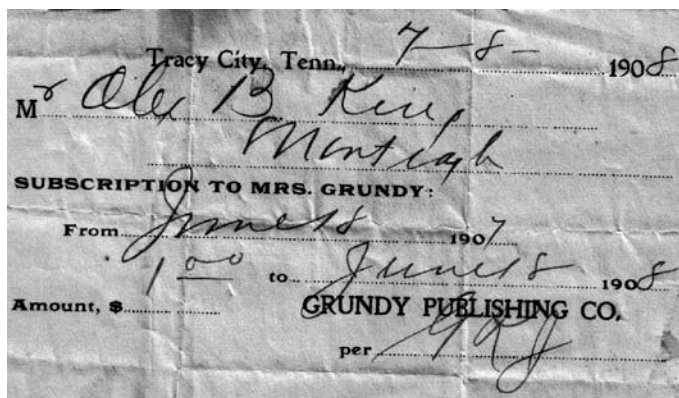


The house was small in one sense, but not as small as the little cabin they had been crowded into for a few years. At first it consisted of four rooms—two narrow rooms on the side next to King Street and two larger rooms on the west side. Weatherboard was used on the exterior. At some point, a boxed room was added onto the northern end and turned into a kitchen. By the time I was old enough to remember the house, the boxing had been torn away and a back porch was left in its stead. The house sat parallel to King Street with steps going out on the southern end of the house also. The old well was on the western side of the house. The photo at the left shows Mary standing on the steps at the southern end of her little house.

(If one looks carefully to the right of the house, an automobile can be seen, either parked in the road or coming down the old muddy King Street. The old Monteagle School sat just to the right of the vehicle but back a few more yards. That is where I lived from the time I was about two-years-old until I married in 1960. The school building had been torn down and a house built there from its materials. The house remained in the family until my mother's death in 1999.)

Alex Benson set up a small merchandise business over on the Marion County side of the railroad tracks somewhere in the vicinity of the corner of South Central and what was known as Main Street, Dixie Highway and later U. S. 41. With a little money coming in, he was able to construct the four-room house, dig a well, build an outdoor toilet, plant a garden with some fruit trees, and fence his property to keep the roaming pigs and cows from destroying his little compound. All of this was going on about the time their fourth daughter Floy Marie King was born on 04 July 1906.

Getting on one's feet and stabilizing a growing family is not always easy, but it seemed that Alex Benson and Mary were on their way to having a good roof over their heads and plenty of food on the table for the children and anyone else who dropped by with hunger pangs. Alex Benson subscribed to the local county paper, "Mrs. Grundy," in 1908, and Mary ordered a year's subscription to "Home Life" magazine in 1911. Reading material gave a cozy feeling to the King home. Reading and conversing at night after the children were put to bed and the neighborhood settled down, was something Alex Benson and Mary could share as they sat at their kitchen table near the old cook stove. Using a coal oil lantern, they read their newspapers and magazines over and over again. Alex may have asked, "Hey, Mary, did you know that Verdi Guest was burned when a keg of powder exploded at the Ramsey mines (1909)?" "That's sad, hope he heals quickly!" Mary may have responded while excitedly blurting out, "It says here, that we will be able to see Halley's Comet between March and June next year (1910)!"



On 02 July 1910, Mary gave birth to a son, Dillard West King; he missed the comet. The girls had been waiting a long time for a baby boy to come along and join them. By this time

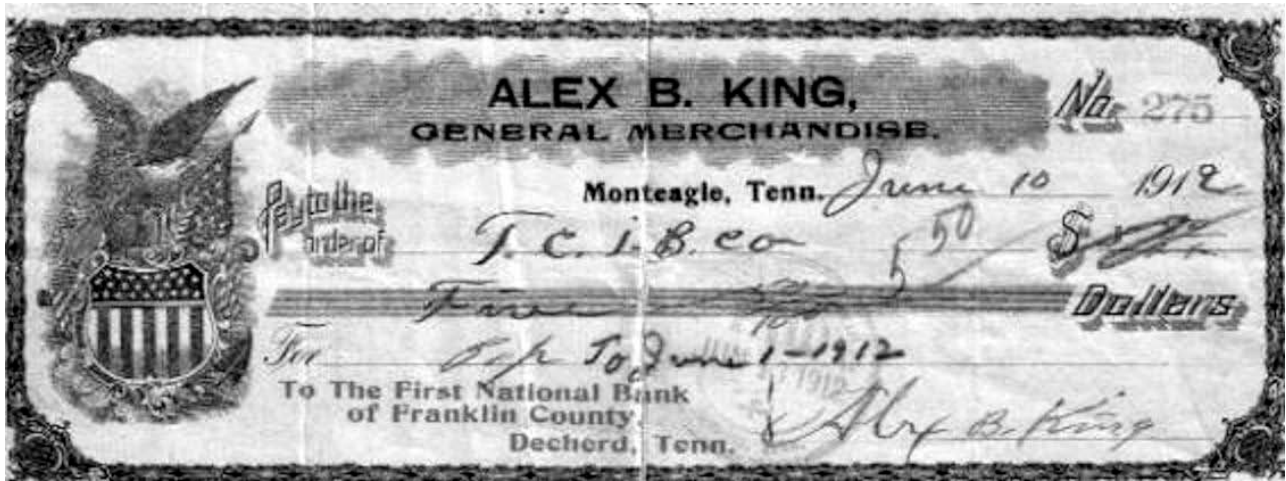
his oldest sister, Emma Rose, was fourteen and old enough to care for him when Mary was busy with the everyday chores for her growing family. Alex Benson was still operating his small merchandise business and trying to improve the quality of life for his family. The girls all went to the old Monteagle School which stood a few yards north of their house at the top of the hill, but on the other side of King Street. The road was also called "The County Road." Two rooms of the former Cleveland and Clara (Meeks) Layne home still have material from the old school in them. I grew up in the original house that was completely built from materials from the old school building.



Old Monteagle School Group With the King Girls; 2nd from right in back row is Emma Rose King; Seated in Front in a Group in White Dresses are L to R: Lillie, Della and Floy King (ca. 1912)

In the spring of 1912, Mary became pregnant again. The child would be her ninth birth, and if he or she lived, she and Alex would have six living children. The business check below indicated that Alex was continuing in his General Merchandise Store. No one in the family knows if he owned a small building on the Marion side of town or if he rented from someone. He wrote the check on 10 June 1912, to T. C. I. B. Company (*Tracy City ??Bottling Company*) for "Pop" that I assume was Coca Cola since the back of the check was signed by K. Bonholzer, the owner of the Coca Cola Bottling Company. As far as I can find out, this was the last business transaction that young Alex Benson King would perform. My thoughts wandered back to 1901 to the form that relieved my great-grandfather from road duty and poll tax because of "physical disability." Did Alex Benson have a health issue that he knew would cause him trouble down the road? Is that why he was so quick to buy life insurance

on himself as soon as he got financially able to do so? Had he lingered and labored under physical stress all those years straining to care for his family?

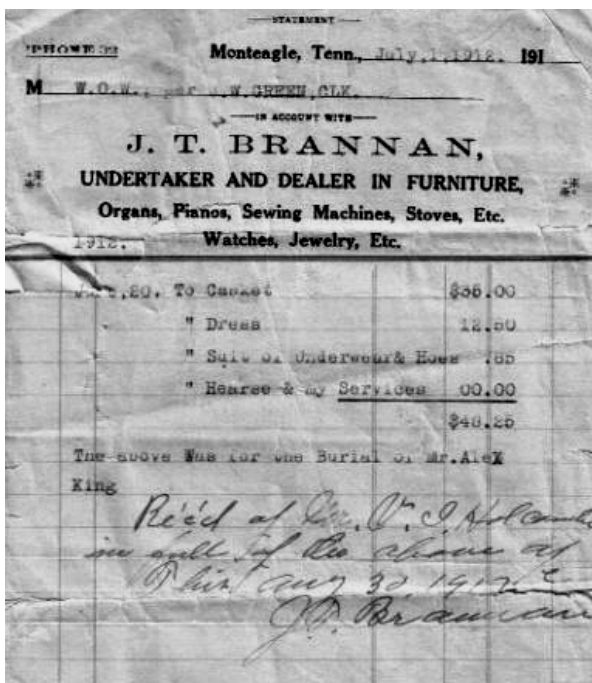


Soon after June 10th Alex Benson became quite ill—so ill that Mary sent her eldest daughter Emma Rose to “fetch” Dr. David H. Bryan in the middle of the night to come to their home. Emma Rose was my grandmother, and when she spoke of that night, she recalled running through the night with her lantern trying to get to the doctor’s house as quickly as possible. When Dr. Bryan arrived, he had Mary to clear the long dining table that sat in the kitchen and prepare it for her husband to be placed there for surgery. He had previously sent for Dr. George Douglas Hayes in Tracy City, who operated a small hospital there, to come to his aid. Family members were never certain what made Alex Benson fall ill, but some believed he had a ruptured appendix; others weren’t certain.

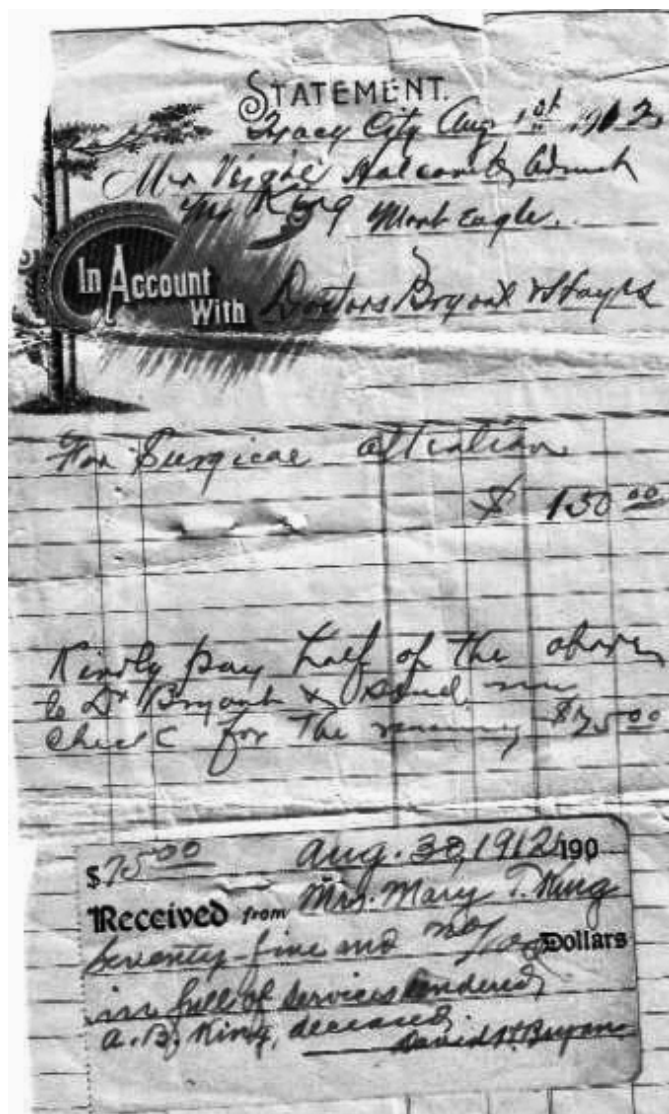
For two or three days, Alex Benson held onto life, with both Drs. Bryan and Hayes working to save him, but the surgeries were too much for him. I say “surgeries” because his death certificate gives the cause of death as being “operations performed on him.” On 20 June 1912, at the age of thirty-seven, he took his last breath while lying in his own bed inside the little house he had worked so hard to build for the family he loved so much. What total sadness and pain had so suddenly been thrust upon this family! What was Mary to do? How was she to feed and educate her five children with yet another one on the way? How could she explain to her children that their father was gone away forever? What loneliness and fear she must have held in her heart each morning as she awoke!

After she laid her beloved husband to rest beside his lost twins in the Monteagle Cemetery, life began to hit her in the face. The child within her stirred as a reminder to Mary that he or she would never know a father. There would be no one to hold her hand when her labor pains began; no one to kiss her on the cheek and say, “Everything will be fine.” One thing she could be thankful for was that her husband had so wisely bought the Woodmen of the World insurance. They furnished Alex with one of the Society’s unique headstones. The

insurance policy probably presented her with enough money to pay for the burial and the \$150.00 doctors' bill, (shown below), that she got from Drs. Bryan and Hayes.



Above: A. B. King's Funeral Cost Was \$40.25



Right: Drs. David Bryan and George Douglas Hayes each were paid \$75.00 for their work in trying to save the life of my great-grandfather.

Virgil Holcomb was the appointed administrator over the estate of Alex Benson King.

On 13 December 1912, Mary Thelia King gave birth to a son christened, James Alexander Benson King. **This was the first day of the rest of her life.**

Note: Any corrections, additions or comments will be appreciated. (Jackie Layne Partin, P. O. Box 295, Monteagle, TN 37356 or email jackiepartin@blomand.net)

For more of Jackie's writings click on the book icon.
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