

Tracy City's Firebug?

by Jackie Layne Partin

Fire, Fire, Fire!! This cry of danger was nothing new to the early citizens of Tracy City, Tennessee. It angered them; it frightened them; it brought one tragedy after another on a town that went to bed wondering what business house, whose private home, which church building or schoolhouse would be next. They knew there would be another, or an attempt at another, a destruction of part of the town. I think everyone knew who the firebug was, the arsonist, and even his sidekicks, but "shush," don't even talk about suspicions, for fire just might come to your building next. Let us present the occurrences of some of the fires and see if we can decide who may or may not have been guilty of arson around town—a big, big deal, not a game, not Mrs. O'Leary's cow!

Some of our older citizens might remember some of the fires or talk of the fires, and responses, "Oh it was awful, just awful!" That seemed to be as far as the conversations went. What about big questions like, "Well, who did it? Why did it continue unabated? Did anyone ever get punished?"

May we start with a short family history of a local Grundy County family that seemed to be one of interest in our late 19th and early 20th Centuries. The surname was Newsom, yes, spelled without an "e" on the end. In Bedford County, Tennessee, on **Dec. 23, 1886**, James Henry Newsom married twenty-one-year old Frances "Fannie" Kelly. The couple started their family with a baby girl, Elizabeth Kelly "Bessie" Newsom born in Bell Buckle, Tennessee in **1887**, and three years later, on **Apr. 11, 1890**, another baby girl, Fannie Lucille Newsom was born. On **Aug. 29, 1892**, Fannie gave birth to her son, Charles Clyde Newsom. Life was good with little Bessie, Fannie Lucille and Clyde running around the house. Even Granny Kelly lived with the family, so how could one complain while sitting on Granny's knee being bounced around in fun. Granny was Martha Jane (Merritt) Kelly, a widow. She had no idea how much her loving care for her daughter's children was to be put to the test.

Life then brought hurt and emptiness to the Newsom family. Life changes from day to day, year to year; it always has and always will. According to her lovely burial stone in Tracy City, Cemetery, Frances died on **April 5, 1893**, leaving her mother and husband three little ones to comfort and care for. James Henry and his mother-in-law saw that they needed land with a house to rear the young family, and on **Aug. 18, 1893**, they bought one half acre with a house from Sidney and Nancy Lowry nearly on the corner of Rutledge and Beersheba Streets, city Lot # 116. On **June 6, 1896**, young Fannie Lucille died and was buried in the family plot with her mother. This left James Henry Newsom, Martha Kelly, and young Bessie and Clyde in the household. James Henry

worked as a watchman at the railroad roundhouse. The two children attended school where Bessie applied herself toward becoming a school teacher.



Frances "Fannie" (Kelly) Newsom



Frances' stone in City Cemetery



Elizabeth "Bessie" Newsom;
Martha Jane (Merritt) Kelly and
young Charles Clyde Newsom

(Photo taken 1897)

Bessie did become a teacher and taught in Tracy City and other places, both in private and public schools. In **1906** she taught as assistant principal with Prof. John White at Monteagle Elementary; in **1910** she taught at Coalmont Elementary. She married Dan M. Fentermacher, a salesman, on **Jan. 6, 1912**, in Comanche, Oklahoma. In **1916** she took time to have children while she and her husband lived in Pulaski and Maury County, Tennessee. In **1930** the family was living in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma where Bessie taught in a private situation. This remained home to her until she died in **1963**.

While Bessie studied for and taught school, Clyde worked in what seemed to be his great interest—printing. Since the Newsoms lived two doors away from Mr. Ike B. Woodward (ca. **1870-1915**), the newspaper editor in town, I believe that it was there that young Clyde acquired his skill and love for printing the news. Ike lived on Beersheba St., printed his newspaper in his home with the help of his wife, and when he died, he chose burial in his own front yard. Could it be that when Ike took his last breath that twenty-three-year old Clyde was right there shedding a tear for the loss of a dear friend?



Ike Woodward's House Near the Newsoms and the Yard Where He Was Buried

The Mountain Herald was entered with the Post Office as second-class mail on **Mar. 31, 1910**. The newspaper works made several real-estate moves in **1913**—from the Knights of Pythias Building on Railroad Ave. to the Haynes Store House also known as *The Yellow Hen*. On **Oct. 10, 1913**, Clyde put this small ad in *The Mountain Herald*, "All

accounts due the Mountain Herald are payable to me, and I will be responsible for all accounts made by me. Clyde Newsom." It was at this time that Clyde became the manager of *The Mountain Herald*. Again **Jan. 29, 1914**, "*Clyde Newsom was in Nashville Tuesday in the interest of the Herald Printing Co.*" With the **Mar. 20, 1914**, issue, the fifth year of *The Mountain Herald* being printed had begun. In *N. W. Ayer's and Son's American Newspaper Annual and Directory*, in **1915** *The Mountain Herald*, Independent, was established with Clyde as its editor and the Herald Printing Company its publisher. The competition was *Mrs. Grundy*, Democratic, established in **1886** with W. C. Abernathy as Editor with Grundy Publishing Co. as publishers. Clyde was in his chosen field of work; he now could edit and manage his own printing company in Tracy City, but was he a manager of money, and was he stable of mind to operate a newspaper with competition from another? Since he is the person of interest in our story, let us try to follow him around Tracy City and other places.

Newspaper Articles Following Clyde During His Ventures

Chattanooga Times – Oct. 26, 1915 – CLYDE NEWSOM ARRESTED FOR TRACY CITY FIRES – TRACY CITY, Tenn., Oct. 25 – About two weeks ago, the plant of the Grundy Publishing company was destroyed by fire, and the fire which occurred early Saturday morning completely destroyed the last of the Grundy County Times, leaving Tracy City without a newspaper for the present. Steps will be taken at once to put up another plant here, and the owners of the two papers will very likely consolidate and have but one paper. Sheriff E. W. Hamby, early this morning, swore out a warrant charging Clyde Newsom with both jobs, and he is now under arrest his preliminary trial being set for Wednesday. Clyde has not yet given bond for his appearance before the magistrate, and is still in the custody of the sheriff. The bond was fixed at \$5,000.

Mrs. Grundy, Oct. 28, 1915 – TRACY CITY HAS DISASTROUS FIRE--\$20,000 Goes up in Smoke Work OF Incendiary Who is Apprehended – On last Saturday morning at 1 o'clock fire was discovered in the grocery store owned and operated by Mr. Henry Flury, which was consumed with a loss of about \$8,000 to stock and building. The groceries and feed store of Victor Flury nearby, was burned, with a loss of \$7,000. The restaurant and living apartment of J. C. Sanders were destroyed, as well as the meat shop of Robertson & Wright, the building being owned by J. K. P. Pearson. Two adjoining buildings owned by Mr. Pearson were also burned. The Grundy county Times, which was over the grocery of Mr. Henry Flury's was also consumed by the flames with a loss of \$1,000, with no insurance. Mr. Pearson were valued at \$2,000.

The fire is believed to have been the work of incendiary. There was no insurance on any of the buildings, which were all frame. No insurance was carried on the stocks destroyed. The fire was seen by the watchman at the engine house, gave the alarm, but the fire had gained too great a headway to be conquered with the limited facilities at hand. Clyde C. Newsome who was arrested Sunday night, charged with the crime and was tried last Wednesday before four Justices of the Peace, who consumed the whole part of the day in examining witnesses, and he was bound over to court to await the action of the grand jury.

The watchman at the engine house who gave the alarm could well have been Clyde's father since "watchman" was part of his job with the railroad.

Another short clip in that issue of *Mrs. Grundy* follows: BOUND OVER TO COURT – *Clyde C. Newsom who was arrested last Sunday night charged with the burning of the Grundy Publishing Co., on Sept. 22, was tried before four Justices of the peace yesterday (Wednesday) and was bound over to await the action of the grand jury for further investigation. His trial for the burning of the Flury buildings and other property comes up to day.*

The photo below shows the old roundhouse; the old Henry Flury Store with Grundy Publishing Co. upstairs; the buildings across the road that burned; and other buildings that disappeared in that October fire. This photo was taken from the Shook School Tower built in **1888/1889**. The Buford House, the large white house against Flurys' Store, had already been taken apart board by board, nail by nail, marked and reassembled at the foot of the hill of the future Grundy County High School (**1928-1929**). It still stands; Sammy Flury reared his family in that house. It was saved from the fire of **1915**, but other buildings that were built on its spot were destroyed in the fire. If one would notice that neither financial banks are in the photo, then a date between **1889** and **1904** can be assigned to this photo. All the houses seen in the top background are in Dutchtown. Many Swiss immigrants came into Tracy City to make their homes.



Sequachee Valley News—Oct. 28, 1915—TRACY CITY FIRE-SWEPT—Tracy City, Tenn., Oct 23—Tracy city last night was the scene of a fire, apparently of incendiary origin, which consumed six large building and most of their contents. Victor Flury's and Henry Flury's stores were destroyed with practically the entire stocks of groceries, feedstuff, hardware, tinware, etc. The lost to Victor Flury 's store was nearly as great. Neither carried any insurance. The building occupied by J. C. Sanders as a restaurant and dwelling, next to Victor Flury's store, was burn. The building was owned by J. A. Hall and was worth about \$1,000 Sanders lost most of his household and kitchen furniture. The store building, occupied by Robinson and Wright as a meat market, and two other buildings, all owned by J. K. P. Pearson, on the opposite side of Ninth street from Flury's store, were destroyed. Robison and Wright saved all their furniture, groceries, etc., and the other buildings were not occupied, except occasionally, by J. K. P. Pearson as offices. He had some law books and some furniture, which was lost. None of the parties carried insurance. The total loss is estimated at about \$19, 000.

The fire broke out in Henry Flury's store, and was discovered about 1 a. m. It spread rapidly and only the heroic efforts of the people who were aroused and got to the scene, saved a number of other buildings. Some of the young men stood between the flames and other buildings and fought

them back when the heat was so great that they had to drench themselves with water frequently to keep their clothes from burning and to afford relief to enable them to continue the fight.

Sequachee Valley News – Thursday, Nov. 4, 1915--“...I was very sorry to hear of the burn outs in Tracy City, but not a bit surprised. Nothing is too mean, low down or dirty for some folks to do. The lawless ungodly element have over awed the best elements of Tracy City, and Mrs. Grundy winked at their lawless conduct and had the audacity to criticize Judge Davis not so very long ago for daring to enforce the law and have his court respected. Reap what you sow, Mrs. Grundy County Times, and only on certain lines would it want the law enforced. Take your medicine and drink it without frowning. There have been crimes committed in Tracy City yet unavenged and according to the narrow ideas of some it would be a terrible sin to dig it up. As to Clyde Newsom, he may be guilty and he may not be. Clyde could tell a whole lot if he would, is my notion. I am not surprised at anything that happens in Tracy City, and I don't guess many others are...”

The above *Sequachee Valley News* entry is quite interesting in that it blames the wildness of Tracy City,(and mind you dear readers – it was a wild town {Jackie Partin}), not only on the perpetrators but the press whom the writer is accusing of bias in his or her writings. Surely this is a **2020** news article and not one from **1915**.

Sequachee Valley News – Dec. 29, 1915 –CLYDE NEWSOM ARRESTED FOR TRACY CITY FIRE – Tracy City, Tenn., Oct. 25 – About two weeks ago, the plant of the Grundy Publishing company was destroyed by fire, and the fire which occurred early Saturday morning completely destroyed the plant of the Grundy county Times, leaving Tracy City without a newspaper for the present. Steps will be taken at once to put up another plant here, and the owners of the two papers will very likely consolidate and have but one paper. Sheriff E. W. Hamby, early this morning, swore out a warrant, charging Clyde Newsom with both jobs, and he is now under arrest, his preliminary trial being set for Wednesday. Newsom has not yet given bond for his appearance before the magistrate, and is still in the custody of the sheriff. The bond was fixed at \$5,000.

Mrs. Grundy, Jan. 27, 1916, – ATTEMPTS TO BURN CHURCH – Clyde Newsom Again Arrested for Attempting to Burn C. P. Church – Clyde Newsom was again arrested last Thursday night about 11 o'clock charged with attempting to burn the C. P. church. Mr. Fred Abraham one of our local barbers who had been out calling that night, and who has a room in his shop where he sleeps, was returning home and had to pass by the Church, noticed someone running away from the Church, and thought he knew who he was so he holloed at him and Clyde stopped,

so while they were talking, Fred noticed that Clyde was pretty nervous and he suspected that Clyde had been into some kind of meanness, so he glanced over at the church and noticed something flare up, and then die down again so it came to him in a minute what it was, as Clyde had been tried on similar charge of setting fire to our plant about four months ago, so Fred wishing to get rid of Clyde so he could alarm the town went in his barber shop and closed the door in Clyde face thinking that Clyde would leave in a few moments which he did. Fred then alarmed the town and the fire was put out, Clyde was tried before Justices Roddy and Tidman and he was bound over to the March term of Court, fixing the bail at \$5,000 in default of which he failed to make and he was placed in the Altamont jail.

The Cumberland Presbyterian Church stood on the corner of Laurel and Depot Streets behind the First National Bank and Fred Abraham's Barber Shop. In these old stories our minds have to go way back in history to understand just where Clyde was slyly choosing his next burn. Clyde was angry at everyone, but he had the upper hand; speak against him and you will be next. How brave Mr. Abraham was! Good for him for challenging Clyde. If the local law and city fathers had not been so afraid of him, then it all could have been stopped on that night, **Jan. 27, 1916.**



The side entrance on Depot St. of the **Cumberland Presbyterian Church**. This photo depicts a **1939 WPA sit-in** under the guidance of Myles Horton of Highlander Folk School.

Please, take time right here to think of what Clyde's actions were doing to his father, grandmother and sister. Seven days later on **Feb. 3, 1916**, his father mortgaged

his house. While Mr. Newsom went to work every day to supply his family with the basic needs of food, shelter and clothing, Clyde was becoming the talk of the town by doing shameful, hurtful, embarrassing and soul damaging deeds, why? On his father's tombstone are the words, "**Railroad Veteran 35 years Service.**" In this life, we must try always to do what is right, all the while Satan is picking away to see if he can tear us down, completely. Obviously, James Henry Newsom kept up the good fight!

Chattanooga Daily Times – 19 Mar 1916 – Tracy City, Tenn., March 18 – Circuit court convened here the first of the week and after a busy term concluded all the dockets late yesterday afternoon. Several were sent up for tipping and are now boarding with the sheriff at Altamont. Fifty true bills were returned. Clyde Newsom who has two indictments against him charging arson and attempted arson, secured a change of venue in both cases and he will be tried at Jasper, Marion county, next June.

The Nashville Tennessean – Mar. 19, 1916 – Change of Venue for Clyde Newsom – Court Satisfied Public Sentiment Against Him – Tracy City, Tenn., Mar. 18, Circuit court adjourned yesterday after a three-days session, with Judge Frank L. Lynch on the bench and B. G. McKenzie state's attorney...the case of state vs. Clyde Newsom, arson, was brought up, and a change of venue asked for and granted on the ground that public sentiment was so adverse to Newsom in Grundy county that justice could not be gotten here. The case will be tried in June at Jasper, Marion county.

Sequachee Valley News – June 22, 1916 – JURY DISAGREED IN CLYDE NEWSOM CASE – Jasper, Tenn., June 16 – The jury disagreed on the Clyde Newsom case tried at Jasper. Newsome was under arrest charged with having attempted to burn the Cumberland Presbyterian Church at Tracy City. On account of hostility to Newsome in Tracy for various other acts in which he is alleged to have participated, the case was moved to this county for trial. Two jurors held out against conviction on account of insufficient evidence, the testimony of a barber in Tracy being practically the most direct proof of his criminality. Newsom, it will be remembered, got into trouble only recently in Chattanooga, being arrested with another party for robbery from a friend, the three being engaged in a celebration in that city wise and otherwise."

Mrs. Grundy, Oct. 12, 1916, – NEWSOM ACQUITTED – Clyde Newsom was tried at Jasper last week charged with setting fire to some matting in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church here in January of this year. The trial lasted two whole days, the case going to the jury at six o'clock p. m., Oct. 5th. The jury reported at nine o'clock that they could not agree. The Court was not willing to discharge them, and they were asked to consider the case further, and attorneys for the State and the defense both asked the jurors to reason together in an effort to reach

a verdict if possible. At eleven o'clock the jury sent for the Court and announced that they found the defendant "not guilty." Thereupon, the jury requested the defendant to remain in the court room, and some of the members of the jury proceeded to "lecture" the defendant and this was kept up for some time. The next morning a number of the jurors were around shaking hands with the attorneys connected with the case, and stated that while they believed the evidence of Fred Abraham to be true, yet someone else might have fired the church and went out on the other side of the building from where Abraham saw Clyde, and for this reason they could not agree on a verdict of guilty, and Clyde being young they felt like giving him another chance anyway.

The case was tried at the June term of the Court and resulted in a mistrial, ten of the jury being for conviction and one for acquittal, the other juror having been excused on account of sickness in his family. The other case pending against Clyde, where he is charged with the burning of Mrs. Grundy and building, was continued by him until the next term of this Court.

On **June 5, 1917**, young, troubled Clyde Newsom registered in Grundy County, TN for the WWI Draft. He gave his father John H. Newsom as his next of kin on his papers. He signed that he had no trade at the time. When he was called up for duty, he found himself to be a Private in the 117 Inf, Co. A, 30th Div. On **May 11, 1918**, Clyde found himself, three officers and 235 enlisted men from Company A on the ship, Northumberland, parting Brooklyn, NY and arriving overseas on **May 23, 1918**. Nearly two thousand men made that journey overseas.

After his division's serious service overseas, on **Mar, 16, 1919**, Clyde departed St. Nazaire, France on the USS Pocahontas with his destination being Charleston, South Carolina. Arriving on **Mar. 27, 1919**. There were three officers and 125 enlisted men from Company A, on that U. S. transport ship, just a small percentage of the total number of people traveling on that particular ship. One need only read about the 117 Infantry 30th Division battles to understand that Clyde, if on duty, was in some of the toughest fighting of the war. Did Clyde return home with a better attitude toward life? Was he ready to help his hometown build upward, or was he floundering all the more with emotional problems?

Somewhere between **1917** and **1925**, Charles Clyde Newsom married, and was divorced before **1930**. I have diligently searched for those records, but they evade me. I will at least give some proof of that happening: *Sequachee Valley News-Aug. 2, 1925, in the Tracy City special news, "Mr. and Mrs. Clyde C. Newsom, of Cincinnati, Ohio, are here on a visit to homefolks."* We see he was married by this social news entry, but by the **1930** Census we can read that he was divorced.

The Tennessean – Apr. 10, 1928 – Two Men Held After Blaze in Tracy City – Clyde Newsom and Julius Brookman are held in Tracy City on state charges of arson as the result of the burning of five of the leading business houses of that city last Friday night, according to the report of T. T. Keith, special investigator from the state fire prevention department here. The preliminary hearing of the two alleged fire-bugs is scheduled for Tuesday but due to the absence of Attorney-General Tom Steward, will probably be granted a continuance until Thursday, according to Mr. Keith. Brookman has admitted his implication with Newsom in the starting of the disastrous blaze and will be a state's witness against his confederate. Julius Daniel Brookman, (1907-1954), was the adopted son of Andrew J. and Jennie E. Dawnam Brookman of Tracy City.

Sequachee Valley News, Apr. 12, 1928 – Tracy City, Apr. 7 – The second disastrous fire here in recent years believed to have been caused by incendiaries, broke out early this morning, and when its progress had been checked four business houses lay in ruins and another was seriously damaged. Two men, Clyde Newsome and Julius Brookman, were arrested and placed in jail to await investigation by the grand jury.

The Henley drug store, Cheek dry goods store and two barber shops, owned by Fred Abraham and H. K. McCurdy, and practically all contents of the four buildings were destroyed, and the First National Bank building was seriously damaged. It may have to be rebuilt. Little insurance was carried on any of the property, it is said.

The charge against Newsom is the second against him in recent years. Following a previous fire here, he was suspected of arson, indicted and placed in jail, and tried in one case, after securing a change of venue, taking the trial to Jasper. The other counts in the indictment were never tried after the first trial resulting in a disagreement, and the second in acquittal.

Brookman, it is said, denies responsibility for the fires. He said he had been "carousing" with Newsom and others. Brookman, of weak mentality, and Newsom were together on the streets shortly before the fire was discovered about 3 a. m. Both Newsom and Brookman are in jail.

In 1930 James Henry Newsom was the watchman at the railroad roundhouse in Tracy City, and Clyde was working as a printer.

THE OAKS HOTEL DESTROYED BY FIRE ON MONDAY NIGHT, Aug. 2, 1934 –
Again Tracy City suffers from inadequate fire protection. Once more hundreds of people are summoned by fire alarms to stand helpless while thousands of dollars go up in smoke. Monday night the Oaks Hotel, owned by L. M. Hines, burned. The fire originating on the second floor, started about 11 p. m. and one hour later only smoking ruins remained of an investment that probably amounted to thirty thousand dollars.

The fire was first noticed by two young men who were passing and the alarm sounded. It was seen that efforts to solve the building were futile and nothing could be done other than removing as much of the furniture possible. Only a small amount of the furniture on the second floor was saved but much on the first floor was carried out though some of this was badly damaged.

The Chattanooga News--Mar. 9, 1935 – GRUNDY COUNTY HIGH BURNS – Loss estimated at \$31,500 – Tracy City, March 9 – The Grundy County High School building, located here, was completely destroyed by fire Thursday night. The fire was discovered in the kitchen in the rear of the building between 8 and 9 o'clock, and due to the strong wind blowing from the north it quickly spread over the interior of the building, rendering it impossible to save but little of the equipment. The building was erected in 1929 at a cost of about \$28,000. The equipment cost something like \$3,500, and all was a total loss as no insurance was carried.

The cause of the fire is unknown, but the presumption is that it must have caught from a defective wire. It was heated by furnaces, and it is not probable that it could have caught from them.



The First Grundy County High School in Tracy City, Tennessee (1928-1929)

Chattanooga Daily Times – Apr. 28, 1935 – Fire Destroys Business Part of Tracy City – Sewanee, Tenn. April 28--Tracy City, county seat of Grundy county, about twelve miles

from here, was in flames tonight and without fire protection as its business section was destroyed at an estimated loss of more than \$75, 0000.

With telephone and telegraph communication cut off, word of the fire was brought here by Mrs. W. W. Jones, of Tracy City. She said appeals for help were sent to Chattanooga, Winchester and South Pittsburgh but that at midnight no help had arrived.

The Masonic building, housing the E. C. Norvell funeral home and the City drug store, Tracy City hotel, Roy Wright grocery store, Hassler department store, United States post office, the concrete building housing the T. V. A. offices, Woodlee restaurant, Thompson café, Tracy City shoe store, telephone exchange and the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Lewis Hines, Jr., were burned out.

Mrs. Jones said no injuries or fatalities had been reported at the time she left shortly after midnight. Flames were sweeping the H. E. Henley store and endangering the First National bank building, she reported. Mrs. Jones said she believed oil had been poured about the Norvell funeral home in the Masonic building to start the fire, which, she said, was of an incendiary origin.

She recalled that the Grundy County High school burned to the ground about a month ago with a loss of \$45,000 and that at that time it was generally reported in Tracy City that a "firebug" was responsible.



Aftermath of the 1935 Tracy City Business District Fire

The lack of any breeze, she said, had kept the blaze confined to the main business block, but that when she left Tracy City the flames were heading toward the Nashville, Chattanooga & St. Louis railway depot. Mrs. Jones is the wife of the Chevrolet dealer in Tracy City and for a number of years has been correspondent there for The Chattanooga Times. The Chattanooga fire department reported at 1:15 a. m. it had received no appeal for aid from Tracy City.

May 12, 1935 – PERRY TELLS ON NEWSOM – Says He Watched other Man Start Conflagration – *The tireless efforts of Sheriff Phillip McGovern drew a confession Monday from Sanford Perry, 24, one of the two local men arrested as suspects in the \$100,000 incendiary fire of April 27. In his confession to Mr. McGovern he implicated himself and Clyde Newsom as being responsible for the fire, which burned ten buildings in one business section, and endangered the whole of Tracy City. Perry said they used oily waste from the railroad yards in setting the fire, but claims he only watched the other man start the conflagration.*

Deputy Sheriff Walter Teets, who first discovered the fire, found that the waste had been stuffed into the side of the Masonic building, a three-story frame, after weatherboarding had been torn loose. It was this discovery which started Sheriff McGovern on the trial of the men believed to be responsible.

No date as yet has been set for the trial of the accused, but it will take place soon. The citizens of Grundy county are deeply indebted to Sheriff McGovern for solving this important case, which will probably put an end to disastrous fires such as the one that took place recently.

It will be remembered that about two years ago Sheriff McGovern solved the Beersheba springs post office robbery, the men being convicted in federal court at Manchester. Grundy County Herald

Chattanooga Daily Times, July 17, 1935, – GRUNDY FIRE CASE MOVED TO MARION – Clyde Newsom Charged with Arson, Gets Venue Change – Under Indictment for Blaze Which Swept Over Tracy City Business Block – Jasper, Tenn., July 16 – *Clyde Newsom charged with arson in connection with a \$75,000 conflagration which swept the business section of Tracy City several months ago, today was granted a change of venue to this, Marion, county by Circuit Judge Leslie R. Darr. The case was set for hearing July 29. Newsom is being represented by the McMinnville law firm of Turner & Hason, while the prosecution will be assisted by Jeff Fults, of Tracy City, and Ted Chattin, of Winchester.*

The blaze which Newsom was charged with setting almost completely wiped out the downtown section of Tracy City, the most recent of several serious fires in that section, all believed to have been of incendiary origin. In granting application for a change of venue today Judge Darr also revived and restored to the court docket a case against Newsom charging him with firing the

store of the Cheek Drug company at Tracy City about six years ago. The case was continued to the next term of circuit court.

Chattanooga Daily Times, July 30, 1935— YOUTH TELLS JURY NEWSOM SET FIRE – Tracy City Arson Case Opens in Jasper Court – Masonic Chairman Also Saw Refuse Behind Torn Plank as Building Burned – Jasper, Tenn. July 29 – Tracy City's fire which destroyed ten buildings on April 27, was started by Clyde Newsom with a bunch of refuse taken from a boxcar and stuffed behind some broken weatherboarding in the Masonic building, Sanford Perry told a Marion county jury here today. Perry, a 22 year-old associate of the 40 year-old defendant, was the key witness in the first day of trial, which began with the quick selection of a jury of Marion countians, the case having been brought here on a venue change from Grundy. On the night of the fire, Perry said, he and Newsom stayed two hours down by the railroad yards, a few hundred yards from the Masonic building, where the fire started.

Newsom, the young witness charged, took a few handfuls of refuse from the railroad car and went to the Masonic building, where a bit of weatherboarding had been torn loose, stuffed the waste into the hole and set it afire. Perry said that he was afraid to cry out lest Newsom do him bodily harm and that he protested against the procedure all the way. The two walked some distance away, Perry said, and watched the fire.

Robert Creek, chairman of the board of trustees of the Masonic building, testified that he had walked behind the building after the fire was blazing furiously and found the waste, giving evidence as to how the fire was begun. Another state's witness testified that while Newsom was in jail on a charge of setting fire to another building in Tracy City some time ago, Newsom boasted that he "would burn the town when he got out."

Newsom, who appears to have no special vocation through the years, graduated with high honors from the Tracy City High school and earned a reputation as one of the most brilliant students the school has produced. He did not take his brilliancy with him into business life, however, and several times has been in trouble. He was arrested about eighteen years ago on a charge of setting fire to a church in Marion county, but was acquitted by a jury at Jasper. A short time ago he was arrested on an arson charge in Grundy county. The case resulted in two mistrials and was stricken from the docket, but has since been restored.

Judge Leslie R. Darr is presiding over the trial. The prosecution is being conducted by Atty.-Gen. A. T. Stewart, Raulston & Raulston, of South Pittsburg; Jeff D. Fults and W. C. Abernathy, of Tracy City; Newsom's defense is being handled by Turner & Haston, of McMinnville.

Chattanooga Daily Times, Aug. 1, 1935 – NEWSOM CONVICTED ON ARSON CHARGES – Gets 4 years for Tracy City Blaze Last April 27. Jury at Jasper Delivers Verdict in

Morning Hours to Judge Darr,--Jasper, Tenn., July 31, Clyde Newsom, 41, was convicted by a criminal court jury here early today of an arson charge in connection with the disastrous fire that swept Tracy City last April 27, and sentenced to four years in the penitentiary. The jury returned its verdict at 1:30 a. M. after receiving the case at 5 p. m. yesterday. Judge Leslie R. Darr sentenced Newsom and defense attorneys filed notice of appeal.

Newsom, the only defense witness, traced his movements on the night of the blaze and said he and Sanford Perry, his 22 year-old associate, who appeared as a state's witness, were near the railroad when they saw the glow of the fire. He said he and Perry left the vicinity for a hill and watched the blaze from that point. He departed, he said, because he had been drinking and was excited and was afraid of being involved.

The Bristol Herald Courier, Aug. 2, 1935, –WILL APPEAL CASE – Jasper, Tenn., Aug. 1 – Attorneys for Clyde Newsom, 41, today planned an appeal to the state Supreme Court from his conviction here yesterday on a charge of arson. Judge Leslie R. Darr gave Newsom a four-year prison sentence after the jury had convicted him on the charge in connection with the burning of 10 buildings in Tracy City April 27.

Sequachee Valley News – Aug. 8, 1935 – FOUR YEARS FOR NEWSOM – appeal Sought in State Supreme Court –Jasper, Aug. 1 – Convicted of arson in connection with the burning of ten buildings at Tracy City on April 27, Clyde Newsom 41, today planned an appeal to the State Supreme Court. Judge Leslie R. Darr sentenced Newsom to four years in prison. The case was tried here on a change of venue. Newsom denied that he had a part in starting the Conflagration which wiped out stores and offices in the rear of the business section. He and Sanford Perry watched the fire from a nearby hill, he told the jury. Newsom declared that he had been drinking and so did not go near the fire. He was the only defense witness.

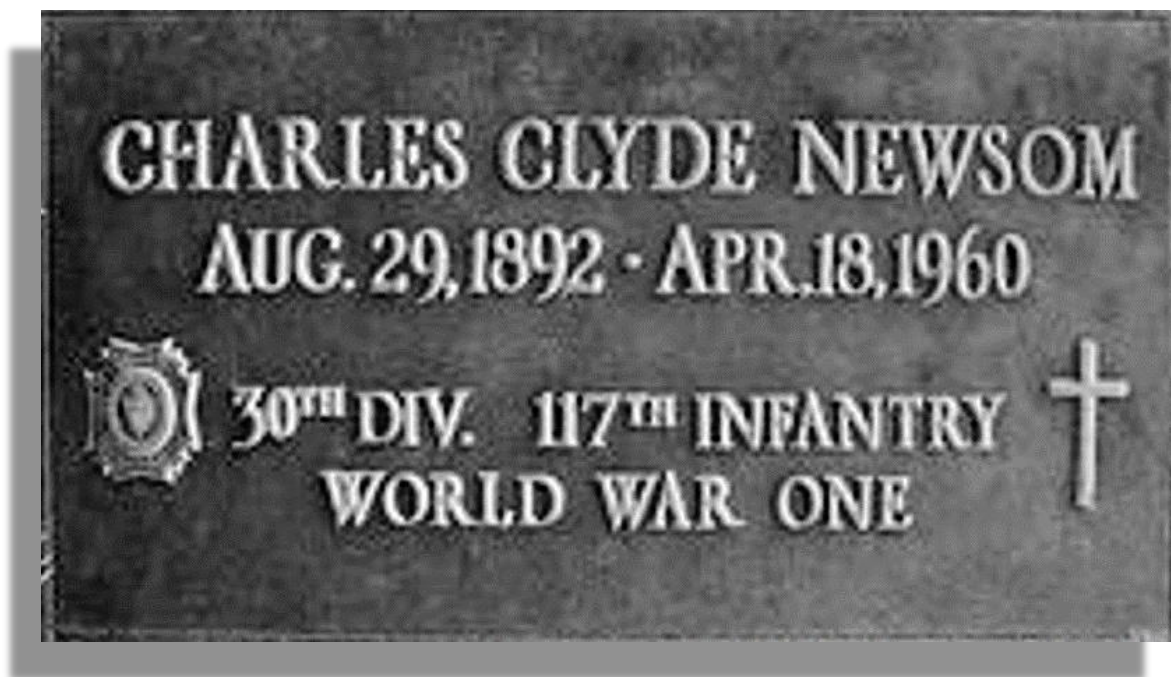
Sanford Phillip Perry (1910-1977) was the son of William "Bill" and Sadie (King) Perry. His burial spot was well hidden during the months/years I surveyed the Tracy City Cemetery. All alone a wild rose bush grew that seemed to invite the cemetery maintenance workers to cut it down and destroy it. Each time I walked by the large bush I carefully moved some of its branches to see if I was missing even a field stone marker. Finally, I saw a broken concrete block which begged me to lie down and crawl under the bush over hangings and move the block. Then I saw it, a rusty, really rusty funeral home marker just peeking out of the concrete block. Carefully lifting it out, a name stood out of the bent metal; here lay Clyde's old buddy, Sanford Perry. Sandford was eighteen years Clyde's junior.

Mr. James Henry Newsom passed away on **Feb. 27, 1937** and was buried in the family plot in Tracy City, Cemetery. A year later on **Mar. 14, 1938**, Martha Jane (Merritt)

Kelly was laid in the family plot with her daughter, son-in-law and two of her grandchildren. Martha's name on her stone is Martha *Jane*, so that is the name I used in this story.

In 1940 Clyde was living in Mountain Home aka Fountain City, TN, and Bessie and Daniel Fenstermacher were living in Oklahoma City, OK when they sold the home place in Tracy City to Elmer Brawley. Since Mountain Home has a large Veterans Medical Center, it is quite possible that Clyde was living there to be near a hospital or other veteran facilities that he may have needed because of battle scars of any kind, mental or physical.

When Clyde registered in 1942 for the WWII Draft, he was living in Los Angeles, California. He gave his sister, Bessie Fenstermacher, in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma as his next of kin. The registrar wrote that he had scars on his right wrist, chin and ear. All could have been battle scars from his troublesome living or the war. In 1944 he filled out his voter registration papers in Los Angeles stating that he was a Republican and a printer by trade. We might say one thing, Clyde destroyed a myriad of relationships throughout his life, not only with family but with friends and neighbors. However, he still forged ahead with his love of *printing*.



On July 9, 1957, Clyde applied for Social Security at the age of sixty-five. He died on April 18, 1960, and was buried in the Memorial Park Cemetery, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.