

Signs Of The Times



FORTSONIA, GEORGIA

1900 — 1990

by

GILMER J. HUDSON

Signs Of The Times

FORTSONIA, GEORGIA

1900 — 1990

by

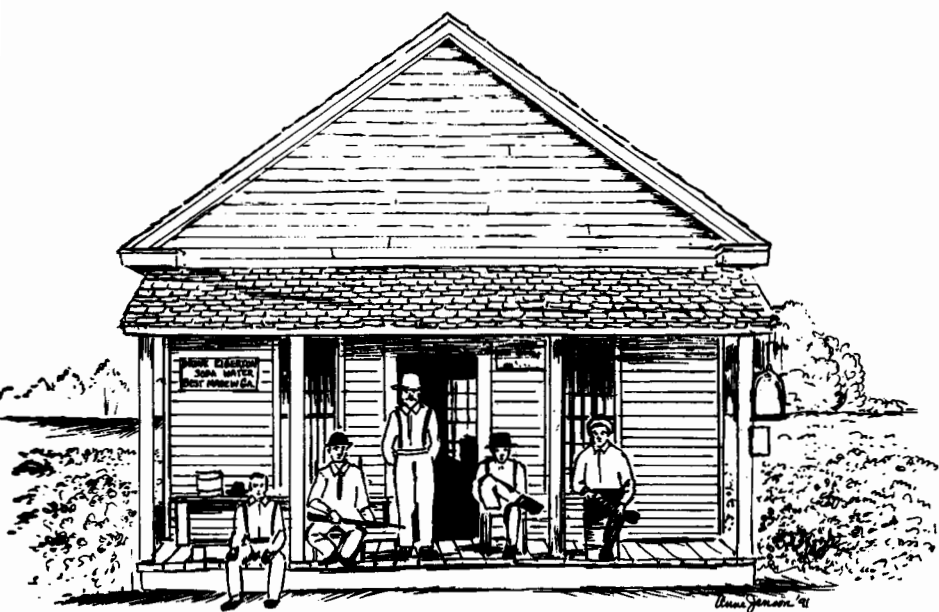
GILMER J. HUDSON

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book is written with the purpose of preserving facts of history, memories of favorite stories, belief in moon signs, human bits of wisdom, and acknowledging the common thread of faith exhibited by the different churches and denominations living in our community. The name of Fortsonia needs to be remembered. I acknowledge assistance in putting these pages together from two books of early publication. One is the **Early History of Elbert County** by John H. McIntosh printed in 1940 covering a period of 1790 to 1935. Also book number two written by Carl B. Smith, **Ancestors and Related Families, Volume II**. This book was written in 1964 while he was living in Tampa, Florida.

FOREWORD

Gilmer J. Hudson is the author of this book. He was assisted in preparation by Barbara H. McWhorter, his daughter. All illustrations are by local artist, Anne Jenson.



S.C. Hudson and Sons

Started in 1912

One of the first settlers of the Fortsonia community was Mr. Barnard Forest Smith, who was born in Anderson County, South Carolina, on October 7, 1867. He had to work at a very young age to help support a large family for his father died when he was quite young. He came to Georgia as a young man and married Sarah Elizabeth Jones, known as Sadie. They settled our village at Fortsonia, Georgia. Here at Fortsonia, he owned a large plantation. He owned the first cotton gin system, a large lumber mill, a grain mill, and general mercantile business that was in the southern part of this county of Elbert. He was a man of indomitable courage and sound judgment. His advice was sought by many of his neighbors. Mr. Barnard Smith died at the very young age of thirty-five at his home in Fortsonia. He was buried at old Bethel Baptist Church in the lower part of Elbert County (Smith).

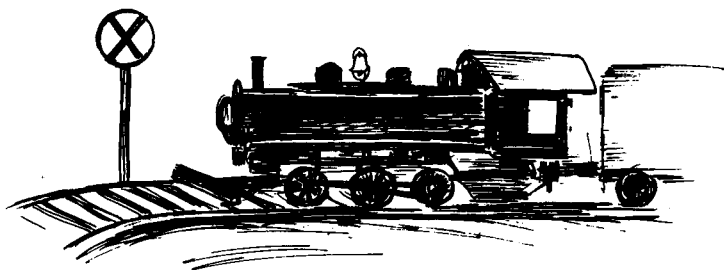
My Grandfather, Stockton Cobb Hudson, bought the original family home, a four-room frame house, and a one-story frame store building with wooden porch on the front from the Barnard Smith Estate sometime between 1900 and 1910. There was also a small fifty-odd acre tract of land that went with this purchase.

Now in regard to Stockton Cobb Hudson, my grandfather, I have these comments to add to his background. He was a man of great moral and intellectual influence in his community. He was a man of few words. He raised a large family of cultured and useful children. He was a large landowner and merchant, reasonably prosperous. He lived and died in Elbert County, Georgia (Smith).

To illustrate the fact that Granddaddy was a man of few words, I'll give you an account that was told by members of his immediate family. On a certain weekend at the Hudson home, a Baptist minister was being entertained for a period of time. This was the custom of that day when ministers visited among the families of the church. There was no parsonage in which the pastor could live. This particular visit of the minister was during the winter season. The story goes that on Saturday night and early Sunday morning, a heavy snow storm came and the members of the Hudson family and the visiting minister were preparing to go to church, that is, all except Granddaddy Stockton. Brother Weldon, the visiting minister, seeing the circumstances approached Grandfather and said, "Brother Hudson, aren't you going to church with us this morning?" Grandfather's reply was simple. He said only, "No, Sir." The minister insisted, "Brother Hudson, would you mind telling us why?" Grandfather couldn't

have wanted it any better. He said, "Yes, I will tell you why. I have always thought a person should have religious beliefs but should also have common sense enough to know when to stay at home." Needless to say, Grandfather Stockton did not attend services that day.

Now, let's talk about Fortsonia. Our little village is located nine miles south of Elberton on Highway 17. We are situated twelve miles on the north side of Tignall and approximately twenty miles north of Washington, Georgia. We are a quiet village inhabited, I believe, by some of the friendliest and most dependable people to be found anywhere.



The name came from the railroad, namely the Elberton and Eastern shortened by some to be the E and E railroad. Its depot name goes back to 1913. The George T. Fortson family gave land for the depot and the three warehouses that were placed on said land and, because of that fact, the name Fortsonia, which is spelled in one word. Over the years, some people have tried to give the name an army slant. By that I mean they spelled it as Fort and Sonia, two words, but that was erroneous.

There was a clamor of public support and interest from people of Elbert and Wilkes counties for the construction of a railroad to have as its termination Augusta, Georgia. The work of determined citizens of both Elbert and Wilkes Counties came about in 1911. A charter was granted for the Elberton and Eastern Railroad Company at a meeting held in Elberton, Georgia, July 27, 1911. There a group of officers, legal counsel, and board of directors from both counties were appointed. Bonds were voted in the amount of \$300,000 and the contract was let during the month of December to Ira L. McCoy of New York City. The route was completed in 1913 from Elberton to Tignall, a distance of

twenty miles. This was through a rich and beautiful farming area that crossed Broad River to reach Tignall located in Wilkes County. The route was later extended to Washington, Georgia (McIntosh).

On June 28, 1913, the first train over the newly constructed Elberton and Eastern Railroad ran from Elberton to Tignall. This train left Elberton at 9:43 a.m. and reached Tignall at 1:30 p.m. A large number of prominent officials made this maiden voyage. Over the years following 1913, this railroad prospered for a period of some twenty-odd years. Before its termination, there were double header steam locomotives pulling large numbers of box cars over these rails (McIntosh).

There were depots along the route of the Elberton and Eastern at Elberton, Cauthen, Fortsonia, Bell, Norman, Tignall and Washington. There was a turnaround station for the steam locomotives in Elberton and Washington as the E & E made its daily runs. My Father, W. O. Hudson, was agent at Fortsonia for this railroad during its entire life. I have been told that one of the most enjoyable past times on Sunday afternoons was for parties of young people from the Fortsonia area to walk the railroad tracks from Fortsonia north to Cauthen station just across Dry Fork Creek and south to the Bell station just this side of Broad River. In 1932, hard times and depression had its effect and a receiver was appointed for the road. But it continued in operation until 1934, when it was sold and scrapped. This road had a life span of some twenty-one years, and there are many pleasant memories of the train whistles and the noise of the steam locomotives as they made their rounds.

My Grandfather, Stockton Cobb Hudson, and two of his sons, my Father, Will Oscar Hudson, and his brother, Stockton M. Hudson, jointly opened a general merchandise store in Fortsonia in 1912 under the name of S. C. Hudson and Sons. The building in which they started in business was a wooden one-story structure 20 feet by 40 feet that had already been operated approximately ten to twelve years by others. My Grandfather and his two sons moved into a somewhat larger building next door, 20 feet by 50 feet, one year later. My Father later bought out the other interests in this business and operated as such until his death in March, 1944. I, Gilmer J. Hudson, the younger son of Will Oscar Hudson, did not feel at the time of his death that I wanted to be tied down with inside work, and I went into farming at that time. Our family sold the stock of goods of the S. C. Hudson and Sons building to a cousin by the name of J. Clark Hudson. Clark

operated this Hudson's Store from March of 1944 to April 1990 at the time of his death.

In May of 1962, I, Gilmer J., bought land of the store building from my Mother, and decided to open up the original building where the Hudson's Store first began. I acquired this building and did extensive renovations by putting on new weather boarding, a new foundation of some sixty-odd pillars of granite from Elbert County, sleepers and double sleepers with subfloor as well as a tongue and groove oak floor on top. I instructed the carpenters to prepare it so that I could drive a railroad car on it if I so desired from front to back over the entire area. So you see, we had two Hudson's stores for twenty-eight years in Fortsonia, the J. C. Hudson Store building in the original S. C. Hudson and Sons' building and the present building of Gilmer's Grocery that began in May of 1962. This Gilmer's Grocery building has been expanded to the size of approximately 35 ft. by 50 ft. with additional storage space upstairs.

Let me say here that there has never been a U. S. Post Office in Fortsonia. There are those who believe there was at one time, but I had the Post Master in Elberton a few years back to check records. He could find no mention of any post office ever being at Fortsonia. There has been some confusion, however, over the years in that letters have been sent incorrectly to Fortson, Georgia, located somewhere in south Georgia. They, of course, would be returned after a period of time to their correct address.

Among the older businesses that existed in Fortsonia was the F. B. Fortson and Son General Merchandise, operated by Mr. F. B. Fortson and son, Frank, Jr. They had a large wooden frame building approximately 20 ft. by 50 ft. This business operated in the 1920's and early 30's. This building was removed in later years, and the new buildings of T & T Tires is located on the same property. Sometime later after Mr. Fortson ceased to operate the F. B. Fortson and Son General Merchandise business, he moved across the highway and began a large steam engine operated sawmill. For several years in the 1930's and 1940's, Mr. Fortson operated a large mill with yard full of logs and rack after rack of lumber stacked on said yard. Mr. Fortson bought and sold timber and employed a crew of workers to carry on his operation.

Mr. F. B. Fortson's son, George H. Fortson, also operated a general merchandise building for a number of years. In the olden years back to the mule days, blacksmith shops for a number of years were operated by several different individuals at various

spots.

Mr. James Fortson, son of Mr. and Mrs. F. B. Fortson, Sr., operated a service station and auto mechanic shop during the period of the early 1930's. James later moved into Elberton after returning from work in Tallahassee, Florida, during the war years. He and Ben Searcy were mechanics for Mr. Claude Ray, Sr. at the Dodge Auto Agency in Elberton, Georgia. When James left Fortsonia, the station and auto shop was operated by Raymond Kelly, son of Mr. T. F. Kelly for a good while. Raymond also ran a saw mill part of this time at Fortsonia.

Our community for years, even decades, was one of the most affluent sections in our county in the production of cotton. There have been at least two different cotton gins located in Fortsonia. One operated by the Elberton Oil Mills for a number of years and the other privately owned in the mule and buggy days.

Besides the stores and business facilities, we have beautiful church edifices. On the north side of our thriving village is the Fortsonia Baptist Church. On the east side is the Eliam Methodist and also the Flatwoods Pentecostal Holiness Church. All of these are modern brick buildings and full-time church facilities. Over the years, our village has seen quite a lot of changes. The present nursing home was one time the site of an accredited eleven year high school named the Nancy Hart Memorial School. This school was built in 1925 and opened for classes in the fall of 1926. It was financed by local district bonds. We had a good school until our state officials decided to consolidate all of our county schools into one school system in the city.

J. C. Hudson's Store ceased to operate in April, 1990, as a general merchandise store because of the death of the proprietor, J. Clark Hudson. Clark bought the store from my Mother, Mrs. W. O. Hudson, in April, 1944. So you see, he had a continuous record of some forty-six years. Clark was a good merchant. He had previous mercantile experience having left Joe Allen's in Elberton, Georgia, before coming to business and to live in Fortsonia. During the forty-six years of operating the J. C. Hudson Store at Fortsonia, Clark was friend to all who came in his store. He left pleasant memories to white and black, for he helped to carry accounts for them. Some of these were weekly, some monthly, and even some of six month duration during the cotton farming years. He specialized in groceries, gas and oil, hardware, meats, shoes and dry goods; and for some years, he sold fertilizer to the farmers.

There was a period of four and one-half years that the Hudson

Store was a partnership. In the spring of 1957, I bought one-half interest in the J. C. Hudson General Merchandise Store, and Clark and I jointly operated this store until May 1, 1962. At this time, I moved next door to a renovated store building in the original building in which S. C. Hudson and Son began their operation. I began my own store operation under the name of Gilmer's Grocery. I chose this name because of there being less confusion about two Hudson stores insofar as mail delivery, bank accounts, etc.

I want to say that in the four and one-half years that Clark and I worked together as partners there were no harsh disagreements. We only had friendly impressions of each other, and I never dealt with a person that I respected more than Clark Hudson. He taught me many good lessons that he had learned by experience. A common question that was asked by strangers during the twenty-eight year period of two Hudson stores being operated in Fortsonia was, "How do you people manage to operate two stores carrying virtually the same line of goods, side by side, here in the rural part of the county?" My answer was, "Why not? Each of us operates our own business, our competition is friendly. I would help Clark if at all possible, and I believe he would do the same for me."

Now back to our present day businesses in Fortsonia. Besides Gilmer's Grocery that operates daily Monday through Saturday from approximately 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., we have Chandler Madden's Grocery and Service Station that also operates Monday through Saturday. The largest and only industry agency at the present time in Fortsonia is the Nancy Hart Medical Center. This is a nursing home facility with a bed capacity of approximately sixty-five patients. This is a well staffed facility with a good state rating and well operated with good personnel, both black and white.

There are two granite sheds and finishing plants that are operating at or near Fortsonia. The H & A granite shed is just above the Fortsonia sign on Highway 17 to the north of our community. Steve Peppers and his father, John C., operate this shed along with other employees during the year. The other shed began by J. A. Smith, Sr. began his operation two miles to the west of Fortsonia two or three decades ago. Since the death of J. A., Sr., the son, J. A., Jr. is operator today along with other help as he needs it.

The new building located on Highway 17 at the intersection of the Flatwoods Academy Road is in operation under the name

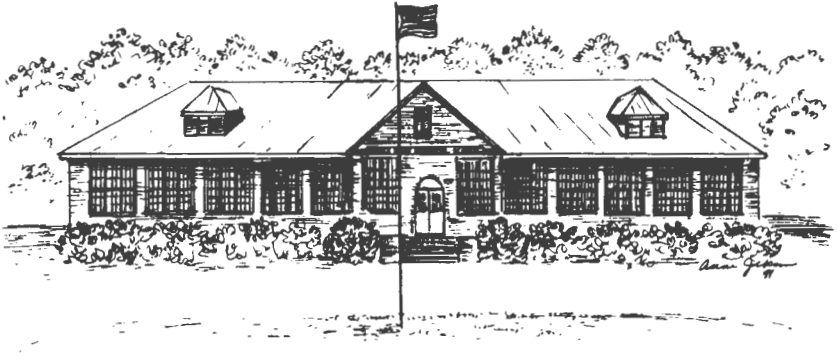
of T & T Tires. It is operated by Ted and Timbo Dye, father and son. Ted has been associated with the tire business for a number of years. He worked with the Granite City Recappers in Elberton for a long period of time before joining the staff of John Duncan also of Elberton. He operated his business when he first came to Fortsonia in the George Ward old feed mill building for several years under the name of Ted's Tires.

Just south of Fortsonia on Highway 17, Barry Brown operates a machine shop under the name of Crown Construction Company. Brown along with other workers builds and services machines used in the making and marketing of granite products for finishing plants. Barry is the son of Billy R. Brown, Chairman of the Board of Commissioners of Elbert County.

The building next to Chandler Madden's service station, formerly the feed mill building belonging to George A. Ward, has been operated since the later part of 1990 by Reuben Smith under the name of Fortsonia Paint and Body Shop. Reuben has just begun his operation and is at the present a part-time operator.

The old Fortsonia Hardware and Furniture building that was operated by Mr. Guy T. Bell until his death on December 30, 1970, is now owned by John Coleman. John started a business known as the Game Room in part of the hardware and furniture building. The operation began in the year 1990.

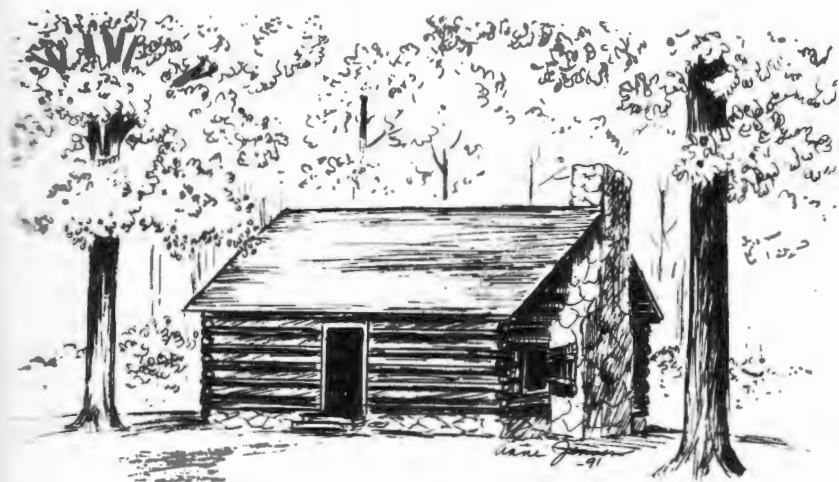
Fortsonia is on the move. The future looks bright.



Nancy Hart Memorial School

Nancy Hart Memorial School

Now I want to mention the namesake of our Nancy Hart Memorial School. Our village is only approximately two to two and a half miles from the site of Nancy Hart's cabin on Warhatchie Creek as the crow flies. That's about one half mile straight across from Broad River just to the south of Warhatchie Creek. A replica of the Revolutionary War heroine's cabin stands now just south of our village. The State, however, did not see fit to continue funding for the Nancy Hart State Park, and it is not as modern today as it should be. It was my privilege as a student of NHM school in my elementary grades to have the honor of speaking the story of this cross-eyed warrior's bravery as she captured those Torries and held them at bay. While others acted out this incident of local history, I stood on the bank of a small creek and recited this portrayal of history of old. I believe that this act of bravery and courage and others of local nature that also told of the act of kindness, bravery and stamina of our people gave me the urge to record some of the favorite stories and legends that are characterized and associated with our village.



Nancy Hart Cabin

Nancy Hart Cabin

This salesman that wanted the souse meat told me what he wanted and how much. I told him that I would be glad to go back and get it, and I cut off the number of slices that he said. He asked me if it would be all right if he ate his meal right there on the counter, and I said, "Yes sir, you can certainly do so." I got him his soda crackers that he wanted to go with it. He went up to the drink box and came back with a big Pepsi Cola. Well, he started off. He took his two or three bites and boy, he just rolled his mouth. "That's the finest I believe I ever ate. I always liked hot souse meat." Oh, boy, he bragged on it. He was regularly drinking his Pepsi Cola though so he asked me in a little bit, "You don't happen to have any pickle around here, do you?" I said, "Oh, yes, we can hunt you up some pickles. The children always have a bottle open back there." So, I didn't try to sell him any. He didn't need many pickles. So, I went back, and I got him out two or three strips of these sweet dill pickles. That's what they were. Like they put in the pickles that they make at home. I gave him those. I said, "You just enjoy them along with your souse meat." "Oh, yes siree." He bragged again on that hot souse meat. But he had gone back about this time to get his second big Pepsi Cola. So he kept on eating, and I went on with my duties otherwise while he finished up his meal. He came over to pay me and started for the door. He said, "Friend, I want to tell you that I enjoyed my dinner with you today. That was some delicious souse meat, but I'll have to tell you also, those

others, love and compassion have been exhibited by the residents of our community. There has been an outpouring of positive deeds in cases of misfortune, tragedy, loss of loved ones, victims of drownings, fire losses, and many, many more failures. I look back to remember the people, white and black, uniting together, to restore and rebuild barns and houses destroyed by fire, and cases where hay was donated when feed was lost. Not only have our people responded to needs of our people here, but our churches in the community, white and black, have risen to give in worthy projects to help the unfortunate among us but also around the world with our missionary offerings. Did not our Holy Bible teach in Luke's Gospel, Chapter 10, that our neighbor was the one who responded to the needs of others, whoever and wherever that need was?

One of the greatest acts of community pride other than the churches that have been built by local congregations was the building of the accredited high school in our community known as the Nancy Hart Memorial School. This school was built by local bonds of citizens in our Eliam District of Elbert County and supported the school as long as it remained. We had one of the most active and perhaps strongest PTA's in this region. Many students went forth from this school to obtain high honors in varied and valuable fields of work. This school not only earned its place in the academic world, but also made its mark in the sports' field. Basketball and baseball were perhaps the primary sports. Basketball was played by boys and girls alike. Both did quite well. All the county schools participated, and the gymnasiums were filled almost every time a game was played. There were county-wide tournaments held in different communities around the county in the first part of March, and this was generally a good fun time. There were sell out crowds each night of the three day and night tournament.

I remember back in the early days of our local schools, one of our superintendents was a sports enthusiast. This man ordered a good bit of equipment for the team to use for playing the game of baseball. He then wrote and called throughout our immediate section of the country and was able to secure a game on their field in early spring with a team in the mountains of north Georgia. Our team went on the date selected without any practice and any training. It was about three weeks after that time before anyone ever found out the score of that game. Fortsonia lost by something like 27 to 1, and the game was called after about four innings. All was not like this early encounter for down through

the years our school had good competitive teams of baseball.

One outstanding accomplishment, I suppose, came in the early 1930's. The high school team managed to schedule a game with the Elberton High team on the Fortsonia school campus. This was a rarity because Elberton did not play the county schools of that day. On this particular day of this big game, the Elberton team arrived with their squad at the site of the Fortsonia school, Nancy Hart Memorial. They unloaded their athletic bus and lined the edge of the road going by the school with equipment including bats, bags of balls, various mits, and all the paraphernalia. They had on their uniforms; and they were dressed and looked very much like professionals. The game got underway. Elberton scored, running up an early lead of something like ten to one in the first three innings. It didn't look too good for the local boys, but the Fortsonia team never quit. They battled back, scoring one or more, to tie the game at the end of eight innings at ten and ten. I understand the pitcher of the Fortsonia team called his catcher out at the end of the third inning and told him that "these boys can hit what fast ball I've got so I'm going with a curve ball now and see if we can't come out of it." He must have been successful because he held them down for several innings. Elberton batted through in the ninth inning with the score tied ten and ten. They failed to score. An excellent play on the infield stopped any runs from coming across the plate. In the last half of the ninth inning, Fortsonia won that game with a run in the bottom half with two hits and an error accounting for the run. Joy was in Fortsonia and so far as I can remember that is the only time the Elberton school baseball team played on the Fortsonia ball diamond. I have been told that members of this defeated Elberton team still blame a certain umpire for their loss.

Baseball had its place through the years both in the days of our old Nancy Hart Memorial School and also community teams that date back to the 1920's. Good community teams over the years have played teams from nearby South Carolina, Lownesville, and Calhoun Falls, several teams from Elberton, the silk mills, the cotton mills, Lincolnton school town team was here on several occasions, and Danburg of Wilkes County came to play here. First Consolidated in the old days in our own county played on many occasions. The games over the years have been very competitive. Many enjoyed the fun of watching our players compete with other teams.

The older players have scheduled some fun games with the

On a scheduled night at Elbert County Courthouse, the School Board had invited the parents from the Centerville school district and the parents from the Gaines district representing the Rock Branch School, both in the northern part of our county, to come to listen to what the school board had to offer them. Information tells us that in the assembly room where Court is held there are three lines of sets of seats with walkways between each line of seats. On this particular night, there was no one, not even the first one, sitting in the middle line of seats. The Centerville people sat on the right, the Rock Branch people sat on the left. This arrangement caused one spectator to observe, "There is no danger of any integration taking place in Elbert County, Georgia. They can't even get the whites to sit together." Needless to say, emotions ran rather high in the feelings for local schools and, of course, because of federal regulations, we did integrate schools at a later time.

A word of thanks to the services of Dr. Jones, a well-respected practicing physician and also Professor Hawes, who was a high ranking administrator in the school system. These two individuals were of immense help to the school board in making this transition possible and workable among the whole set of people.

Fortsonia has through this period of years from 1900 through 1990 supplied the citizens of our county candidates for political offices in our court house as well as state house official positions. In the 1930's and 1940's, Mr. T. F. Kelly, a resident of Fortsonia and Justice of the Peace of Elbert County, Eliam District representing Fortsonia, performed many duties. I think you could say as Justice, this included quite a number of weddings. Mr. Kelly also successfully filled several terms as Representative from Elbert County in the General Assembly of Georgia. He also served as Senator for the District in which Elbert County is a part.

Mr. Guy T. Bell was Superintendent of the county schools before the consolidation with the city during the period in which we had a separate system. Mr. Bell served in this capacity from 1941 through 1948. Mr. Bell later served two years as Representative from Elbert County in the General Assembly. This period was 1949 and 1950.

Dr. G. A. Ward probably would not care so much about his name being listed as a politician, but he did serve a term of office as Chairman of the old Board of Trustees of the Nancy Hart Memorial School. Dr. G. A. Ward, Sr. had his home in the Fortsonia community most of his life. He was born in the upper part of Elbert County but came to live for several years in our community

with other families. Among those were the H. A. Bell family, the S. C. Hudson family, and the J. C. Allgood family. Dr. Ward practiced general family medicine and made home calls to white and colored alike. His practice as family physician was well accepted throughout our area of the county, and there were many families who did not know there was another doctor as long as he practiced medicine. Dr. Ward, after living several years in a single room with other families, bought a home in our community. Over the years, the home was remodeled, added to and made very modern. There was a time, however, that Dr. Ward had a small two room office building in the heart of Fortsonia. This building was located half way between the S. C. Hudson's Store building and the building that later became Gilmer's Grocery. Dr. Ward treated patients in this building over a period of years, but later abandoned this building and used his home as his headquarters. His practice was wide spread, for he had many patients over in nearby Wilkes County.

Mr. F. B. Fortson, Sr. served as Chairman of the County School Board when the Board was appointed by the Grand Jury of Elbert County and when they consisted of control of the county schools. This Board was composed of five members. In the 1960's, an act was passed in Atlanta, Georgia, creating an elected board of five county school board members. The people approved this method, and the first elected school board representing five separate districts in the county were: District 1, Gilmer J. Hudson; District 2, Jack Dye, Jr.; District 3, George T. Oglesby; District 4, Harrison Turner; and District 5, Robert E. Lee. This Board was pressed into duty before their elected term was to begin by act of the Superior Court because of the resignation of the old appointed board. Whereupon at their organizational meeting, two members of said board resigned their positions for this extra time of duty, leaving only Gilmer Hudson, Harrison Turner, and George Oglesby. These three by law selected two others to represent their respective districts. Rucker Mills was chosen from District 2, and George Gaines was named from District 5. This Board of five men served until the original elected board's term began their duties to serve.

The present county school Superintendent is a resident of the Fortsonia community, Col. Charles Dixon, son of Mr. and Mrs. J. C. Dixon, and is serving a second term of office in this capacity. The public schools in Elbert County have made progress under the leadership of Col. Dixon and the school board. We are very fortunate to have a very qualified and dedicated staff of teachers

and administrators.

One citizen of our community filled two very important offices over the years in our Court House in Elberton, Georgia. This man was Mr. John A. Starks. He was first elected Sheriff of our county. After serving in this capacity for a period of time, Mr. Starks ran for and was elected to serve as Road Commissioner of Elbert County. At that time, there was only one commissioner, and Mr. Starks was the commissioner for a period of years. During that time, laws were passed in Atlanta changing the method of voting from one commissioner to five being voted on by districts. Mr. Starks refused to run under this set of laws, and insofar as I remember, Mr. Starks was never defeated for office. There were some close races, but he always managed to have enough votes.

Mr. Billy Ray Brown served on the Board of Commissioners from District 2 for several years. When this law took effect, creating the five commissioners, he has since been elected Chairman of this important Board of Commissioners having charge of the roads and revenues of this county. Mr. Brown is a resident of our community, well-respected, and liked among our people.

[A few years ago, Mr. J. Wad Dixon, a resident of our village, was Coroner of Elbert County for a period of time. Mr. Wad was a good friend of everyone. He mixed well with the people, and he was well liked. I remember once when our family sustained a huge loss from fire, losing a large barn, several mules, all the hay and feed crops that were gathered that year, Mr. Dixon told my father to send me and my truck over to his farm and get a large stack of hay to help feed the cattle. I stopped by his house later to thank him after having finished hauling the hay. His remark was to me, "Son, you didn't need to stop and tell me thanks, if I hadn't wanted you to have it, I wouldn't have told you to come." He was an outspoken person but very friendly and well liked.]

Our present Representative in the General Assembly in Atlanta, Georgia, is Mr. Charles Yeargin. In our District, Elbert County being a part, Charles represents all or part of several counties. He has ably served this district now over a period of years. Charles and his wife, Louise, reside in Fortsonia. They have many friends and are well liked throughout the district that Charles represents.



Gilmer's Grocery began its operation with the doors open to the public for business on May 1, 1962. Proprietor, Gilmer J. Hudson, had completed four and one half years of partnership in the firm of J. C. Hudson's Store. Prior to this time, Gilmer had farmed after coming out of Nancy Hart Memorial School, a graduate in 1937. To get the whole life story, you have to remember Gilmer grew up in his father's store in the days of S. C. Hudson and Son. Gilmer, through long hours of planning and numerous contacts, settled on various lead items for

his store. He wanted to promote and feature certain items of which are included: Amoco gas and oil products, definitely wanting to feature the white gas of Amoco's line; America's Best flour; Endicot Johnson shoes and boots; Bettermade ice cream, wanting to dip cones; N & W overalls; fresh meats — fat back, homemade sausage, beef, chicken; hoop cheese; and dry goods of all kinds. You see, my idea was to continue to offer the public a general merchandise line of goods.

On May 1, 1962, Clark and I divided the stock of goods of Hudson's Store, which was our partnership, and I moved my one half interest next door to go into the building that was the beginning spot for the trade name of S. C. Hudson and Son in 1912. The size of the building had not been changed except in renovating, we had torn off the back ten feet that were used for the operation of a grist corn meal and made this a new part using the same ten feet of space. The carpenters used the original outside sills, approximately eight by twelve out of white oak. All sleepers and center sills, granite pillars from the ground up were added, subfloor was pine, but the top floor we used number two grade of oak hardwood. The original ceiling and inside wall boarding is still intact from the 1912 era. We gave the inside two coats of paint, weather boarding on the outside, and started in business on May 1, 1962. The stock we moved from the old location along with new merchandise that was delivered on that date made our shelves appear rather full. Our new setup on the inside was a growing new concept for grocery and general

merchandise stores. I visited some places of business within our county before redesigning our new layout. We used the old wall shelves on each side, but we made an island in the approximate center of the building where the cash register was stationed with customers having access to either side.

From an early beginning of a meager stock of goods, our business has allowed us to add to our beginning stock and enlarge several phases of our operation. For the first eight to ten years of our operation, grocery sales and related items would have amounted to something like ninety percent of our total sales. Let me say though that when we began our operation, there were no shopping centers in Elberton nor close to us. We did have some large independent grocers in Elberton and some chain grocery units, but they were on a much smaller basis. Another thing I would like to note was the change in life pattern and stocks of goods carried in country stores. In 1912 to 1930, the store of S. C. Hudson and Son and like general stores featured products related to mule farming-the Hayman plow stock, the Vulcan middle buster, two-horse plows of all kinds, Cole planters, bridles, plow lines, plow points, various bolts of all kinds, cradles for cutting grain, horse shoes for the mules and horses, nails and staples for the barns and fences, axes and wedges for providing wood for the stove and fireplaces, axle grease for the wagons, bulk oil for the T-Model Fords, and so on. This era changed before I started Gilmer's Grocery in 1962; in fact, it changed during my farming years of 1940 to 1957. I witnessed first hand many changes in farming itself.

I began assisting in farm operations when only eight to ten years old. My Dad sent me to the field with the colored plow hands when I wasn't big enough to reach the plow handles. I thought this was a hard punishment at that age, but I look back now to see that he was giving me some of the best training that he possibly could have. He taught me how to work. My job was to carry fresh water from the wells on the farm to the fields where the farm hands were stationed. I had a gallon jug that I regularly filled and carried. Some of the other jobs I had were to drop seed in planting corn, one to two seeds to the hill one step apart. The rows then were four feet wide. Late in the season, we had to drop sulfate of ammonia or nitrate of soda around stalks of corn. By the way, a passing note, corn was plowed in those days until it was in the tassel. In the last plowing, we broadcast peas in the middles, to keep the weeds down and if seasons permitted, we picked some late peas to put on the table

for a delicious meal.

We had to do a lot of chopping fields of cotton, corn and vegetables. You see the hoe and plow stock were the tools we had to fight the crabgrass, the weeds, the morning glories, and other pests like Johnson grass and bermuda. My father, W. O. Hudson, bought an old Fortson tractor that had the iron wheels. It must have been in the late 1920's or early 1930's, and my first experience with this tractor was not a very happy one. This particular tractor was wired so it cranked by the use of a car battery, and the tractor would go dead the furthestest point in the field from where that battery was left. You see the battery was not mounted on the tractor itself, we only carried it around. The steel wheels on the tractor hit every large rock in those flatwoods fields that we worked and had just enough power to pull a small, double-section smoothing harrow that had about twenty-four twelve inch round discs. Needless to say, I almost fell out with tractors with my experience with the Fortson tractor of old. After buying several used tractors when he discarded the old Fortson, Daddy bought a new U. C. Allis Chalmers in 1937 with a five disc Athens plow and a double section sixteen inch cutting harrow, a new sixty combine, and a new era had come about.



'GILMERS GROCERY'
IF WE AIN'T GOT IT - YOU DON'T NEED IT!

'GILMERS GROCERY'

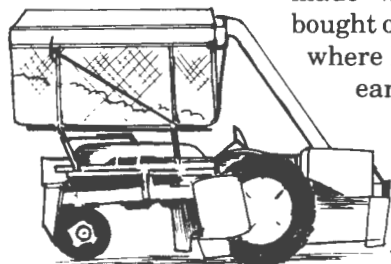
If We Ain't Got It — You Don't Need It!

It became my first job when I was finishing a high school education to spend my many days of hard work operating this equipment in our farm operations as well as the fields of neighbors doing custom work. One of the first business ventures that I did on my own after my marriage to Mary Brewer Tate in 1940 was to trade a 1938 Ford automobile as down payment on a new B Model Farmall tractor with all the planting and cultivating equipment. This was one of the first two-row planter and cultivator outfits in the lower part of Elbert County. In 1942 and 1943, we started out, Mary and I, on our own. We lived two years at the Ham place on land belonging to my Father and other members of his family. Cotton, corn and grain were our principal crops in this two year duration. In the fall of 1943, the land we were living on was sold, and we moved onto the Major Wallace property at Bell, Georgia. Mr. J. J. McLanahan was owner of this property at that time. My Father, W.O. Hudson, died in the spring of 1944 on March 12. Mr. and Mrs. J. J. McLanahan both were very good to Mary and me. They went out of their way to help us in so many ways. It was while we were living on his property that Virginia, our first child, was born. During our stay of three years at this location, our primary crops were grain, including oats and wheat, and also hay. We had lots of river bottoms to cut, as well as follow up grain crops such as lespedeza for hay. Cotton and corn were planted on a small scale. While we were living on the river farm, we managed to save a few dollars here and there, and we bought the Anthony Slay farm, one hundred and thirty-one acres more or less on the

west side of Fortsonia some one and one half miles in that direction.

In the spring of 1946 with the help of colored workers, logs were cut from this land and hauled to a local saw mill belonging to D. C. Dixon. This lumber was used that summer and fall to build a modern, three bedroom home that Mary, Virginia, and I moved into in the late fall of 1946. Many changes began to take place in our farming operation after we became settled in our new home. When we began farming on the Slay farm, we owned four mules. Soon that number was down to three, and after approximately three years, there were only two. Some two years later, we sold the last pair of gray mules that I bought when we started eight years earlier. The A. C. Allis Chalmers tractor and equipment and the B. Farmall and its equipment were traded or sold. I bought a new 45 Allis Chalmers with planters and went to mechanized farming. With this era of farming, I primarily grew cotton. Along with my own cotton acreage, I rented several people's small contracts and hired local workers and also transported additional colored cotton pickers to assist in the harvest of the cotton crop. Hiring sufficient hand labor and being able to pay a wage that would be profitable became almost an impossibility. In the fall of 1955, we purchased one of the first one-row mechanical pickers, mounted on a 45 Allis Chalmers tractor and we planted some forty acres of cotton on our land and other rented acreage. 1955 was a banner year. We harvested some cotton that year on our land that produced better than 1000 pounds per acre of lint cotton gathered by the mechanical picker. So you see in less than ten years, we had gone from part-time mule farming all the way to complete mechanical even to the harvest of cotton. Economic conditions, less labor to hire, high prices for farm land, inability to rent land for cotton production, and high costs of machinery, led me to decide the time had come for us to look to other fields of work.

In the early part of 1957, a deal was made with J. Clark Hudson, and we bought one-half interest in Hudson's Store where I had grown up some thirty years earlier. Farming was terminated at this point except for gardening which I enjoy today even with my seven horse power Troy built tiller. The four and one-half year partnership let me get



the feel of public business, renew acquaintances with friends and neighbors, and get acquainted with salesmen of different companies. When I formed new contacts and I felt by faith that Mary and I and the children could make it on our own, Clark and I dissolved our partnership. In early 1962 there was a new general merchandise store in Fortsonia under the name of Gilmer's Grocery. Let me say here that Mary has been the faithful partner in this Gilmer's Grocery business through the years. By faith in God, we began this business. We were short on capital but long on faith.

Over the years the children came to bless our home. Barbara, the second daughter, William (Bill), our son, and Estelle, the baby girl, were all born while we were living on the Slay farm. Virginia, our eldest daughter, had graduated from high school and was in nursing school in Anderson, South Carolina, when we made our start at Gilmer's Grocery. Barbara, our second daughter, came on to help Daddy and Mother in dipping ice cream and waiting on customers as they come into our store, and as she finished her high school education, moved on to employment in the granite work of our county. Then Bill, our son, began to get involved. By the time I was stricken with a hemorrhage of the stomach with ulcers in 1969, Bill, along with Mary, and a close friend, Walter Nash, had to keep the store doors open to the public until I recovered from the operation. Bill went onto finish his high school education at Elbert County High and then enrolled in Georgia Tech. When Bill was a student at Georgia Tech, he was instrumental in adding an addition on to the store. This was in 1976, and the addition was approximately twenty feet. This addition was used for storage for our expanded inventory.

Let me say something about the changes for our expanded inventory. For instance, we started with a few pair of overalls as a beginning in wearing apparel for men workers. Today we have a large inventory of men and boys blue overalls, both in the first grade and also irregulars which is a cheaper line. We have added to the overall line of work clothing all kinds of work jackets, some five or six different types and kinds of overalls in more than one label brand. Also you will find sweatshirts, thermal underwear, camouflage overalls, pants and jackets, along with Western shirts and a number of kinds of work shirts. From a beginning of a few pair of work shoes, mostly six inch, and a small stock of rubber boots, we now today have a large stock of eight inch leather boots that include steel toes, several kinds

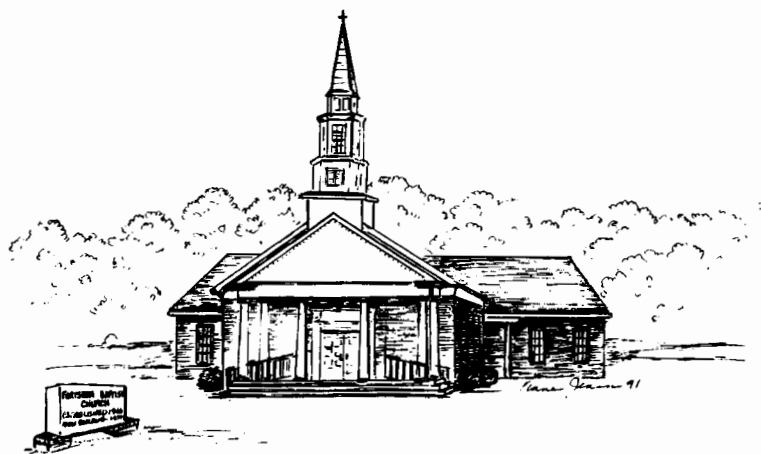
of insulated boots, as well as regular plain leather boots. We have at least five different number of six inch work shoes, and we carry in stock all sizes of boys and girls rubber boots, some for the small toddlers and even as large as thirteen and fourteen in men's sizes. Along with the shift from groceries to dry goods, hardware items such as barbed wire, dog wire and garden wire were among items added to our general merchandise line. As this was taking place, we were blessed with customers who began coming from distant locations. Some as much as fifty miles or more to buy products from our store.

Our fourth child was born July 13, 1961, Eva Estelle became a helper in the store at an early age. She assisted in dipping ice cream, working the cash register, and general jobs. A favorite humorous story concerning Estelle's clerking at our store was in the fall of 1984. This occurred while I was recovering from a kidney bladder operation. A customer come seeking seed potatoes to plant in the early spring. I had in stock a number of bags in the stock room, but only one bag on display in the front of the store. This customer inquired of Estelle who was minding the store at this time, how much the potatoes were. Estelle's reply was, "I don't know whether my Daddy wants to sell the whole bag or not!" What Estelle had not been told was that Daddy had more than one bag in the front, and he definitely wanted to sell all the entire amount. You just don't keep seed potatoes, but there was a slight delay! Estelle made valuable contributions to the operation of Gilmer's Grocery for a good number of years.

Let's summarize the operation of our store. I have told you of our line of goods when we started on May 1, 1962, now as we come to the end of 1990, our stock of goods consists of a very small line of groceries, these are kept only for convenience primarily for we can no longer compete with the supermarkets a few miles away. Gone are the days of buying beef and pork in large quantities and featuring fresh meats. When we started, we sold fresh fryers, beef roasts, the beef steaks, hamburger, pork chops, neck bones, the back bones and ribs. For example, we now carry only cold cuts of bologna, liver cheese, head cheese or souse meat, homemade pork sausage that some customers come long distances to get, tenderized ham, and slab bacon in the meat department. We still maintain our American's Best brand of flour that is a favorite particularly among the older customers. We added to our general merchandise line in 1970 a complete stock of bulk vegetable seed that we put in stock when Mr. Guy T.

Bell of Fortsonia Hardware and Furniture Store died in 1970. Down through the years, various lines of clothing and dry goods as well as shoes and boots of all kinds have been added. Our inventory of work overalls featuring the Pointer Industries and starts with a size 2 Toddler and now reaches the mature size of 64 in the waist. We try to fit them all. A sign has been over our front door for approximately twenty years now that reads, "If we ain't got it, you don't need it." Our son William (Bill) saw that we adopted this sign as a slogan for our business. The Lord has been good to us over the years. We have withstood the hard places, the stumbling blocks, the periods of falling economy, and the times of weakness of the human body all through the Lord's strength and guidance.

As we think about the scriptural blessings enjoyed by the people of the Fortsonia community, I would need to remind you that our people have joined together on special observances at designated places. Vacation Bible School is an example of this occurrence. Through the years, children from Fortsonia Baptist, Eliam United Methodist, and the Pentecostal Holiness have enrolled together to study God's Word. We have strong ties with dedicated faith that runs throughout our community. This trait is highly evident in all of the churches at Fortsonia. There are moments though that stress the light and comical side of our church life. I remember a particular Sunday morning service when the congregation was standing for the final Sunday School hymn. The song was concluded, the benediction was given by the Sunday School Superintendent, and the congregation was dismissed. This particular couple never was seated. They had simply gotten the Sunday schedule confused.



Fortsonia Baptist Church

I have been honored by the members of the Fortsonia Baptist Church to serve as Deacon in our church since October, 1948. During this forty-two year period of time, a goodly number of memorable experiences have taken place. Among these are some that are unusual, to say the least. One such occasion took place during Brother Crosby's interim pastorate in the 1960's. Our church for a number of years has observed the ordinance of the Lord's Supper on specific dates. On one of these specific times, Brother Crosby concluded his opening morning worship service and then asked all the deacons to assemble on the front pew

of the church. At this particular time in service, Brother Crosby said, "Our Vice Chairman will take charge of the service now." I know I must have frozen in my seat on that pew. You see, I was at that time the Vice Chairman of the Board of Deacons, and no one on that Board of Deacons nor myself, had any instructions on how to conduct the service. Over the years, I had always seen the pastor conduct the service himself with the deacons assisting by serving the trays and leading in prayer when asked. I quickly motioned for the Deacons to rise in their seats and stepped toward the pastor while they were doing so. Quietly as I could, I asked Brother Crosby what I was to do. He responded very softly, "Call on one of the Deacons to pray and then give the service back to me." There were some anxious moments in the observance of that Lord's Supper in our church. It wasn't many days before there was a special Deacon's meeting. The business at hand was to discuss the Deacon's duties in the observance of the Lord's Supper.

One other experience took place when our church was without a regular pastor, and the pulpit was filled by trial sermons from pastors who were seeking a new home. One of the number who was preaching at the time agreed to come on a particular morning to preach the morning service. We had discussed the directions to travel and the order of services in our particular church. On arrival at our church this Sunday morning, I invited this trial pastor to sit with our Senior Adult Men's Class for Sunday School services. He agreed and was sitting on the front seat when the committee of ladies in charge brought out the table cloths, trays and utensils for observance of the Lord's Supper. I was standing at the front of the assembly preparing to try to teach the class, and when I noticed the ladies come out I looked down at our visiting pastor, and he must have looked up at the same time, and his countenance froze. The look on his face was as to say, "Brother Hudson didn't tell me about this." After the Sunday School class, I quickly informed the guest pastor I was sorry I forgot to mention the proceedings of our church on this particular Sunday that we did observe the Lord's Supper. Happily though, I can inform you that the servant of the Lord performed his task very well. He did mention, however, that he would have preached a little differently if he had known the information before he came.

Several years ago when Brother John B. Hunter was interim pastor at Fortsonia Baptist, Bro. Hunter was to eat dinner at our home. As most everyone knows, I am an ardent and avid

baseball enthusiast. There was scheduled a most important game to be telecast that Sunday P.M. between the Yankees, my favorite team, and the White Sox. This game would have a definite bearing on who would win the pennant that particular year. I had told the wife we would not say anything about the game, just leave the T.V. alone and try to entertain the pastor. As we finished up our meal at the table, Bro. Hunter rose from his chair, and he asked, "Brother Hudson do you care if I turn the T.V. on? I would like to see that game today between the Yankees and the White Sox." My reply, "Why, of course, it is all right, Brother Hunter. If you want to watch the game, you go ahead and turn that T.V. on." You know, it was an interesting afternoon, one Yankee fan and one White Sox fan.

Brother Ben Glosson was pastor of our church for two different calls. I remember the first sermon Brother Ben preached for our congregation. He came into the church accompanied by a friend. Both Brother Ben and his friend must have weighed from 200 to 250 pounds each, and both looked like professional football players. Brother Ben stepped in the pulpit a short time after to deliver a very powerful sermon taken from the Gospel accounts of Christ dying on the cross with the two thieves hanging by Him. Somewhere in that sermon Brother Ben made this statement, "If you miss seeing me, you wouldn't have missed much; but if you miss seeing my Saviour, you missed it all." Brother Ben was a good mixer with the people of the community and the church family. I recall this conversation between Brother Ben and myself when Brother Ben come down one day to pick some butter beans that we had in the spot of ground by our store. While we were in the act of gathering these butter beans, Brother Ben turned to me, and he said, "Brother Gilmer, what do you think members of the church will say when they come along the highway and see the pastor of Fortsonia Baptist Church and the Chairman of the Board of Deacons down on their knees before the Lord picking butter beans?" My reply was, "Well, Brother Ben, I would just invite them to join us."

In fun in the store one morning, Brother Ben in the presence of a



noted Methodist friend of the community said, "Brother Gilmer, our friend here has expressed an interest in coming to our church as a member. How would you comment on this matter?" "Well, Brother Ben," my reply was, "since this is a very unusual circumstance, this couldn't be handled with the usual procedures, I think this would require a wholesale investigation." That was all Brother Ben needed. I thought he would roll in the floor while our friend just quickly and quietly tapped his cane. Brother Ben was a dynamic preacher. While our pastor, he preached a number of series of revival services in other churches throughout our area. He could sing, play the piano, pray, teach, and preach. One of our members commented in regard to Brother Ben, "You just couldn't hitch him up wrong." He could do it all. Brother Ben went on to bigger churches and larger congregations.

Brother Allen Danner was one of the youngest pastors of our church. I don't think we ever had a more dedicated, consecrated pastor to his work and his people. He filled the pulpit with well-prepared sermons, he visited among the people, he was one of the most dedicated to the upkeep of church property that we ever had. I remember how he would get on the lawn mower we had at that time at the church and cut the grass, keeping it looking neat and clean. Especially do I remember while he was our pastor, he joined in with other members of the church to apply a heavy sealer coat of tar to the paving area around the church. This was, I think, one of the hottest weeks we ever had, and everyone had to truly work by the sweat of the brow. Brother Allen was one of the hardest workers during this period of work. Brother Allen is active today in our area at Rayle, Georgia, and I only have pleasant memories and pray God's blessings on his ministry and his family.

Brother James Bohannon is our pastor at Fortsonia Baptist as we cross the 1990's. Brother James has served one of the longest continuous calls in our church history. Brother James ate dinner in our home the day he preached his trial sermon and the afternoon he was interviewed by the Deacons of our church. I learned during the Sunday noon meal in talking with the pastor's family consisting of his wife, Mildred, and their young daughter, Nona, that there was a closeness to this family. Not only was there a closeness, but I also sensed a solid commitment by Brother James to his work and to his Lord. Since his call to pastor of our church, he had done his work well. He has prepared his sermons well and has brought many truths to our attention from God's Holy Word. We have never had a more faithful visiting

pastor to the hospitals, nursing homes and to those confined to their homes. I have nothing but the fondest memories of his work here at Fortsonia Baptist, and I can only hope and pray God's richest blessings on his ministry and his family.

In concluding this section on pastors of Fortsonia Baptist Church, let me say that any omission of any of our pastors over the years at Fortsonia Baptist is not intentional. Time and space does not permit further comments. I will sum it up like this. During the period from the Rev. J.C. West until Brother James Bohannon, I have tried to cooperate with each and every pastor we have had. I love each and everyone of them, and I have no ill will toward any. I think I was blessed and made stronger by having known them all. Thank you, dear Lord, for each one of them.



In 1940, Highway 17 that runs through our village was paved during the spring and summer months. Mules and wagons had not vanished from the scenes at this time. On this particular day, the weather was fair and rather hot. From the north side of Fortsonia, came a very familiar sight, a

one horse wagon with a nice looking mule pulling it and a couple of white, Fortsonia residents riding on a high seat on said wagon. As this mule-propelled vehicle approached the business district of our village, everything was calm and quite ordinary. Something took place. I don't think anyone ever knew what that unknown object or being was, but certainly this very calm mule became a run away on a race track. The driver of the wagon had to hold on standing up in the wagon leaning back on his lines. The other passenger was hanging on to the seat holding on for dear life. As they came to the first store of the village, all speed limits had been broken. The question was where would the race end. The road was not finished at this point, but ditches had been pulled and foundations were in place for later paving. My father, operator of his store, was running gas for a lone traveler from out of state. The run away one horse wagon with the mule and two passengers came along the highway while Dad was running gas in the spectator's car. The wagon passed by and ran into the ditch on the left side of the wagon. The left front wheel of this one horse wagon was buried in the bank. The mule pulled the tongue completely out of the wagon, and both men went sailing through the air some twenty to thirty feet onto the bank. The mule ran off something like fifty feet and was standing there looking back at the two men on the ground with the lines and front pieces of the wagon hanging behind. The men were wearing large Western style straw hats that were common in that day. The younger man arose from the ground first, and some moments later, the driver, an elder man, joined the first. Both dusted their trousers off and began to walk a few steps. After a few quiet moments, my Daddy went around to the visitor's car to receive payment for the gas he had pumped into said vehicle. "Mister," the complete stranger, the lady inside said, "do you people put on shows like this everyday?" My Daddy replied something like this, "No ma'am, not everyday, but quite often." She said, "I have

paid for a ticket at the theatre many a time and didn't see nearly as good a show as I did today."

On behalf of the S. C. Hudson family that has served the community and to those who have passed through our mercantile doors, I would like to express sincere thanks for your trade and friendship through these seventy-nine continuous years. We have many fond memories of the days of service in business with you and hope that our length of time serving you will bring back happy and pleasant thoughts.

Fortsonia is a wonderful village. I am proud to have been a part of this village and community all of my life. God has been good to us and blessed the community down through the years. Brother Philip Hart, pastor of the local Pentecostal Holiness Church, passed along this bit of comfort and strength to me, "Keep looking up." May God bless each of you, and I would ask you to "Keep looking up."

