

## EARL CARLTON – A TRUE ROVERITE

On September 18, 2008 Rover and the surrounding communities were saddened with the news of the death of Dallas Earl Carlton, who with his wife, Lavada, were the proprietors of Carlton's General Store in Rover. This community lost a wonderful friend and all who knew him will sadly miss him.

Dallas Earl Carlton was the son of Clayton and Maggie Smotherman Carlton. He was born April 21, 1922 and lived in and near Rover his lifetime and claimed to be a "True Roverite", which all agree. As a young boy he began helping his parents in the store business in 1931 and at the age of 13 began running a peddling route alone. He made serving the community his life-long profession.

In addition to serving his community, he also served his country. In 1942 he answered a call from Uncle Sam and served in the US Army three years. He was awarded a Bronze arrowhead for D-Day landing, and 5 Bronze Stars for major areas of Battle, Normandy, Northern France, Ardennes, Rhineland and Central Europe. He returned home in January 1946. On March 30, 1947 he married Lavada Crockett and they had 2 children, Stephen and Donna.

After returning home from the service he re-joined his parents in the store business and later, with his wife Lavada, became the proprietors of the Carlton's General Store in Rover.

Carlton's General Store wasn't "just a country store". This store was often a bank, a message and information center, a post office, a service station, a place to get a quick breakfast or lunch and a gathering place for the community whittlers and problem solvers. In addition to filling the request of "almost" any item available, they were often the first greeters of new

residents of the community and could well be called the "Ambassadors of Rover". The Carlton's, Clayton, Maggie, Earl and Lavada "WERE" Carlton's General Store. Their respect, friendliness and helpfulness were evident as soon as one walked in the door. This will be missed.

In 1986 for a Tennessee Homecoming project, a committee was formed (by Earl Carlton) to write and publish the history of Rover. This was accomplished and later a second volume was completed. These books would have never been available for generations to come, if it wasn't for his insistence and hard work on the projects.

Since Carlton's General Store has been such a valuable asset to the Rover Community I have included some history of the store and the days of the peddling wagon. The following information taken has been taken from "The Incomplete History of Carlton's General Store, Rover, Tennessee" written by Earl Carlton for the "Rover History" published in 1986.

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Clayton Carlton began his career in the retail country store business November 12, 1931, at a place in Rutherford County near the Bedford County line called Last Chance. This place has since been renamed and is now called New Town. A short time after the store was opened, with an inventory costing \$130.00, Clayton began his peddling experience, leaving Maggie, (his wife) to run the store and look after the children. His first peddling was done from a 1924 model touring car he bought new for \$357.00. This was used a short time, then a 1927 model T. Roadster was bought from Lewis Gleaves for \$12.50. Clayton's brother-in-law, John Puckett, visiting from Florida, built a bed on the back that one could stand on the ground and reach

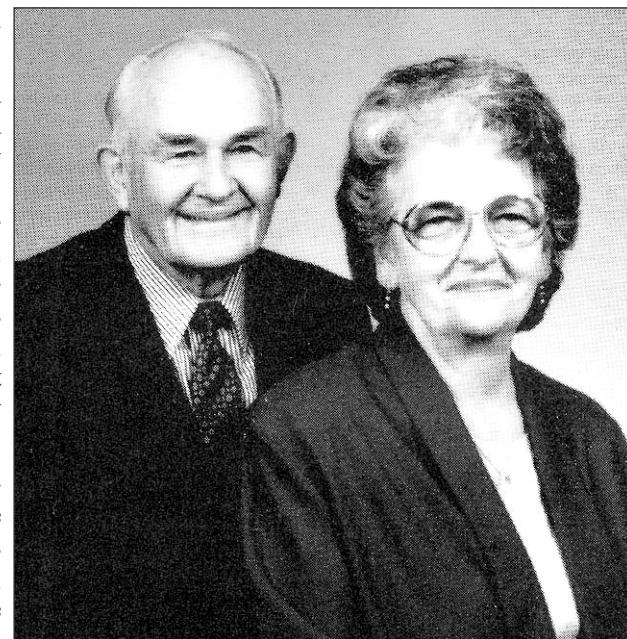
anything inside. Cost of material \$10.00, labor free.

In January 1934, Clayton and family moved to Rover and were succeeded in the New Town store by R. B. Lamb. Their move was to the old Phillip's Place on Beasley Road, across from where the first Rover School was located and was owned by John Smotherman, Clayton's father-in-law. (First house on the left on Beasley Road from Highway 41A).

At the Phillip's Place, merchandise was stocked in the side room off a back porch. At this time, most foods such as beans, sugar, salt and coffee came in bulk. It was the children's (Frances, Earl and John) job to package these products during the day or after school for the next day's route, as peddling was continued from this location. We also had some regular customers that came to buy from this side room storehouse.

In 1934, Clayton bought a ½ ton maroon panel truck for \$200.00. Bro George Stem built the shelves in it while it was parked between the Methodist Parsonage and a barn that no longer exists. In 1935, Clayton bought the Jungle Town Store that was previously owned and operated by Jim Davis. This was an old frame and boxed wood building without electric service, or telephone and with a hand operated gas pump.

Peddling continued and in 1937 Clayton bought a green 1-½ ton panel truck. Clayton Carlton, Earl Carlton, Condra Lamb, Cecil Eley and John Carlton drove this truck. In 1941 a new store building was built. A concrete block construction that included a large cellar next to it for storing eggs and



Earl and Lavada Carlton

other things to keep them cool. This was also used by the community as a safe place during a storm. This same year Clayton bought a new 1-½ ton blue Ford without cab or bed. Mr. Cecil Bowling from Rockvale built custom bed with shelves, back deck, chicken coop and fee hauling space. Mostly Earl drove this truck until he was called into the service December 1942. After Earl's departure, Clayton continued to peddle with sometime the help of C. J. King, leaving Maggie at home to tend the store, the garden and the youngest child, Jean, who spent a lot of time in a cardboard box while her Mother was busy.

This store and farm was sold in 1946 to James and Wayne Read. This store building was destroyed by fire in June 1956. On September 19, 1945, Clayton bought at public auction eight acres in Rover, known as the Lena Chick place at the intersection of highway 41 A and Kingdom Road.

There was an old house, which was later torn down, and a smaller house used by Dr. Manier and Dr. Garret as a doctor's office. This small building was enlarged and was used for living quarters for the Carlton family.

In early 1946, Clayton began construction of a new store building in the corner of the yard on highway 41A. The building, built by the Crick brothers, Maggie's uncles, was completed and opened for business in April 1946. To date (1986), there have been four additions made to this store building. Earl operated the Rover store until September, that same year. By this time, Clayton, Maggie and Jean moved from Jungle Town and peddling continued. The truck was driven into rear half of the building at night for loading for the needs of the next day's route. In October 1950, another new truck was bought and a modern and convenient bed was built for it. A complete store on wheels for its time. This truck, driven by Earl was too large to go into the store so it was loaded at the side door. Earl had many experiences while driving the peddling truck he enjoyed sharing through the years. The store, truck and farm kept the family busy day and a good part of the night until 1955 when the truck was sold, thus bringing to a close the peddling days of the Carlton's.

Over the years the store continued to expand and the slogan "We Sell Most Anything" was adopted. More and different types of merchandise were added. Earl's parents owned the store until 1963 when it was sold to Earl and Lavada and at that time, Lavada joined Earl in the daily store

operation. Her presence at the store allowed Earl more time servicing and installation of wiring, plumbing, appliances, pumps and etc. He was a registered electrician, with a Master Plumber Certification and diplomas from School of Pump Service and Installation. He also stated that much of his knowledge came from reading as well as experience. Many long hours of labor 5:30 – 6:00 a.m. to 11-12 p.m for a number of yeas. Earl often left the store at closing and went to out in the community to fix an electrical or plumbing problem. He certainly was one who cared for his friends and neighbors and went out of his way to make their lives much easier.

As inventory grew, space seemed to grow smaller, so in 1976 a new building, used as a warehouse was built. About this time a new slogan was adopted; STORE OF THREE WONDERS (1) You Wonder – If we have it (2) I Wonder – Where It Is (3) Everybody Wonders – How I find it.

In the 1980's a room was built on the side of the store building, a heater was added and later a fan for the summer use. It became a place for the men of the community and surrounding areas to meet, greet, read the paper, eat a snack, smoke, whittle, have lengthy discussions and maybe try to solve some of the world's problems. Some use the cedar shavings from the whittlers in the pet's houses. (The building of this room is another example of the Carlton's caring for the community and it's citizens. This room has well been used over the years. On a rainy day, the room would almost be filled to capacity.

In the 1980's and 90's health issues, due to strokes, bypass surgeries, heart valve replacement and "Old Arthur", caused Earl to slow down his daily activities, but he continued working six days a week. In the last few years Earl again added another slogan "Still kicking, but slow and low."

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When Earl and his wife, Lavada, locked the doors of Carlton's General Store on November 14, 2007, they had no idea this would be the very last time for Earl. As health issues worsened, he wasn't ever able to return to the store.

Like many of you, I feel I've known Earl and Lavada all my life. My grandparents, aunts and uncles lived in the Rover Community and I spent a lot of my childhood visiting them before moving here in 1964.

My very first memory of Earl Carlton was in the early 1950's, when he was operating a peddling wagon and would stop at my aunt and uncle, Lela and W H. Reed's house. One day while my grandmother and aunt Lela was selecting their groceries they let my cousins and I get some candy. All of a sudden my cousin, Charles, got choked on a jawbreaker. Mr. Earl grabbed him by the ankles and shook him up side down until the jawbreaker came out of his mouth. That was one scary time and we were reminded of that event each time the peddling wagon came.

My thanks to Lavada for permission to use the above information on Carlton's General Store.



Carlton's General Store, Rover Tennessee