

## **A Step Back in Time** By Bobbie Sue Shelton-Lonas

The following account of the “WINDROW STORM” was written in 1963 by the late Bob Baskin and printed in a Rutherford County Historical Quarterly. Our appreciation to Pauline Arnold for contributing this article to the Eagleville Times.

Thursday morning, March 13, 1913, was a warm, damp and wind was gusty. It was almost Spring and the daffodils were in full bloom, the trees were putting forth tender young buds and mother nature was ready to change her old brown winter dress for one that was green, bright and gay! The farmers were busy turning land for the early crops and the vegetable gardens were already planted. Schools would soon be out so all the children would be able to help with the crops. Rutherford County was almost purely dependent on the agricultural economy at this time and it was necessary for all able bodies members of the family to share in the work.

The people of Windrow lived, worked, and shared in the beauty and joys we have always found in this great country. In 1812 Mr. John Windrow came to Rutherford County, Tennessee and decided he liked the flats. The hunting was excellent as wild turkey, deer and many other kind of wild animals were in abundance at the time. Even tho the land was hilly, it was very rich and grew all kinds of crops and was excellent for pasture.

By 1913 Windrow (named for Mr. John Windrow, the first settler) was a little cozy village, semi-isolated in the hill country ten miles west of Murfreesboro, Tennessee. A small stream winds its way through the village. There were two general stores, a blacksmith shop and two churches, a Methodist and a Church of Christ. One hundred and three years earlier, the people of Windrow started the famous Methodist Camp Ground meetings on four acres donated for this purpose by Mr. John Windrow, the first settler.

There are many people in and around Windrow living at this time who remember the terrible storm that hit this place at 3 p.m. on March 13, 1913. Mr. Roy Watson was a school boy of thirteen and he has been my chief source of information for this story...On the day of the storm there were periods of darkness and hard rain, then the sky would get bright for a while and then again darkness, rain and light. By two o'clock Miss Mary Knott, who taught the thirty children in a one room school, decided to dismiss the children so they could get home as it appeared to her that a storm might come. After leaving school, Roy Watson stopped at the Methodist Church because he knew his “little sweet-

heart”, Leanna Rowland, would be coming by on her way home. Very soon she came skipping down the road and across by the church. She waved her hand and said to Roy, “Don’t forget the sweet milk” and crossed the wooden footbridge to her house on the side of the hill, a hundred yards east of the church. She was killed minutes later, along with her father, Lee Rowland, wife and a small son. The only survivor was an eleven-year-old sister.

Immediately preceding the storm there was much wind and thunder and lightning. The rain fell in torrents and the sky was exceedingly dark. There was a distant rumbling sound in the southwest as the sky continued to change from light to very dark and according to eye witness, a two pronged twister could be seen coming, one from the west and another from the southwest. The two came together with a resounding blast in the heart of the village.

The cyclone passed toward the east rather quickly and after the “sound and fury”, there was a silence and stillness for a while. All the people in the village had suffered shock, injury or death. Very soon hundreds of neighbors from near and far were there to assess the damage and help in any way. Uprooted trees, buildings, trash, etc, had blocked all roads and people had to ride a horse or walk in, as did, Dr. Garrett, Dr. Sidney Smith and others who came to help.

Mr. Sam Jackson and wife, son Ira, daughter Minnie, Keathley Alcorn and Odie West were in the Jackson house at the time of the storm and the house was one hundred yards west of the Methodist Church. Almost on the spot where Archie Macon now lives. There was a blacksmith shop in the corner of the yard. Both were swept away.

Minnie Jackson Kelton is the only person, now living, who was in the house when the cyclone hit. A new floor had just been finished. The house was picked up and carried high into the sky, it broke open and fell apart, but the floor held intact and all six of the people, after a “magic carpet” ride, were dropped on a hillside two hundred yards away. All survived with some minor injuries. The Methodist Church vanished completely, foundation stones and all. The store by the bridge was blown away and the store below the church was picked up and dropped off its foundation and partially destroyed. Nearly all the trees on the churchyard were pulled up by their roots. One tree lives to this day to testify to violence and destruction that hit Windrow fifty years ago. Now it is an old ash tree that stands twenty feet southeast of the present Methodist Church, scarred by

## **THE WINDROW STORM**

flying timbers, trees, rock and debris. It is said all sorts of matter was stuck into the tree trunk, even straw. Huge scars are still on the tree trunk.

The Lee Rowland family lived only one hundred yards from the church and just due east on a hill side across the ditch. The family was very ill with Typhoid Fever, except Leanna (Roy’s little sweetheart) who had just returned home from school. The house was blown over the top of the barn and smashed into the side of a hill three hundred yards away. One child in the family survived to tell the story.

Rev. Jeremiah W. Cullom, a Methodist circuit rider, who lived from 1828 – 1915 and preached at Windrow many years, has the following story in his journal titled, Warm Hearts and Saddle Bags. Thursday April 17, 1913 – Listened today to the details of the storm March 13, which blew down the church at Windrow (My old charge), and killed Lee Rowland, his wife and two children, the oldest girl, Mamie, escaped with a broken arm and other injuries. Her description is pathetic. “I had gone into the cook room to make a fire in the cook stove, when the storm came. The house began to whirl round and round. Mother said, “let us all take hold of each other and die together”. The next thing I knew I was lying under a mattress that had lodged against a stake. I crawled to the rest of the family and they were all dead. (Every building was destroyed). I went to the barn and it was gone. I then went to the church, but it was gone. I was wet and cold, so I sat by a stump and was nearly frozen. At last, someone came in sight with a lantern and found me”. Rev. Cullom concludes by saying, “I was called to assist Rev. R. A. Covington in the funeral services but was sick and could not go. I had married Bro. Rowland and wife 13 years ago”.

The torn and battered bodies of the family were found by their neighbors. The father, Lee Rowland was near the top of a hill, two hundred yards from where the house stood. He had a two by four timber through his stomach and pinned in the ground. Mrs. Mattie, his wife, was nearby and badly torn. The little son, Sammy age 5, was clutched in his father’s arms and Leanna was found fifty yards away. All were killed instantly. The bodies were taken to the home of Dick Windrow who lived across the road and a short distance from the village. It was a sad and sleepless night in Windrow.

The next day hundreds of men worked to clear the roads so caskets could be brought in while others dug graves with pick and shovel. It was not possible to clear the road

to the graveyard, which was one half mile away by the shortest route.

The funeral was attended by as many people as could come by foot or horseback and it was a very sad occasion. Mr. Windrow’s house would hold only a small part of the huge crowd since there was no church now. The bodies were placed on stretchers and the men carried the bodies of this unfortunate family a distance of one half mile over rough fields and to the top of a hill where the graveyard is located. All the people followed to witness and pay last respect to this fine family.

It is a neat and beautiful little graveyard on the crest of a high hill and there is a beautiful view. Rev. Roy Watson walks past here many times each day as it is between his house and the farm. He has never lived any other place; so I suspect Roy never passes this spot without thinking of what happened just before the storm when Leanna skipped by, waved and said, “Don’t forget the sweet milk”.

In 1921, I lived on the same farm where Leanna and her family worked, played and died. I always loved the view from Windrow Hill, so I had one more look the other day and it is a grand view of the rich heart of Rutherford County with the ring of hills near the border on all sides. Moments of meditation are good for the body and soul and upon looking down to the right, near the foot of the hill, one sees the area around the head of Overall Creek where Widow Snell and her children settled in 1804 and I think of the great influence this family had in the development of our county. To the left is Blackman, a breadbasket during the civil war. Then during the moment, I turn to have one more look at Windrow...only one mile distant. It has not kept pace with “Progress”, but is still, quiet, and beautiful. We are happy it is this way, for on top of this hill to the right Roy watches over the grave of “Little Sweetheart” who lays in eternal rest, a victim of the Windrow Storm. ■