

## Spotlight on Florence Downey

One of the most truly colorful and interesting people that I have ever known was Aunt Florence Downey who was the wife of Deacon John Downey. Born in 1875 on a river bottom farm between Sale Creek and Soddy, Florence Suttles was raised by her mother after her father's death in an accident in 1877. She related to her granddaughter that her mother raised all the children until they were able to leave the farm. During those years of youth she remembered many Indian visitors to their farm including one chieftain who told Mrs. Suttles that he would tell her where enough gold was hidden to raise all her family if he could have her beautiful blue-eyed sister, Lizzie. Of course, Mrs. Suttles dismissed the Indian's offer and kept her daughter, and "the gold is still hidden on the hills of the Double G Ranch."

Florence met and married John Downey around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, and they established their home about midway between Sale Creek and Bakewell on what is now called Old Dayton Pike. John was a farmer and an orchard man by trade. In addition to crops, he operated a dairy and some peach orchards both individually and in partnership with his brother, Otis. Florence was never one to stay in the house and not get her hands dirty. No work was too hard for her, and she was known and fondly remembered by family and friends for being able to pull the front edge of her long skirt between her legs and tie it under her belt in back forming a britches look and then climbing a peach tree as quickly and easily as any man. She could work daylight until dark and preferred that to inactivity. She was quick of wit and intolerable of laziness...even perceived laziness or inactivity in her own family.

One day her husband, John, decided that he must go to Chattanooga on business. Dressing in his good clothes, he descended the steps in front of their home and stood waiting for the southbound Cherokee bus alongside Dayton Pike. As Aunt Florence passed the front door and espied him there, she became increasingly annoyed at his just standing there. Finally, in desperation, she yelled out, "Why don't you start walking to meet the bus, John?" Another time after she had passed her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday, she became concerned about whether or not her home suffered from infestation from termites, so she crawled under the floor looking for them.

Aunt Florence was never a seamstress by any stretch of the imagination and was more or less forced out of the actual sewing when the ladies of the sewing circle met to make quilts. Instead they allowed Aunt Florence to thread the needles which probably made for much nicer quilts. She did not mind as long as they kept her busy with her work.

As she got along into her late eighties and nineties, her eye-sight failed her, and she took up knitting and crocheting. She related, "As I work with this yarn, I relive other days when I helped my mother prepare wool for cards, spinning wheel, and loom and remember how hard it was to get the different colors dyed. I compare my present day comforts and joys with the joys of those days for there was joy in hardship. I am thankful for the many years I've been privileged to live. My husband and I had four children – Katharine Downey McDonald, Thyra Downey, Cecile Downey Pope, and Irvin."

"I have made thirty-six afghans, seventeen for children and grandchildren, some for nieces and nephews and friends. I had the pleasure of making one for our minister (Dr. Irving Jensen) last winter. I am represented in ten states and three in Germany. I

started this activity about 1958 after an accident that hindered me from being active in orchards, gardens and yards, and poor vision which hinders reading. I do my work mostly by feeling and thank the Lord continually that I can do this.”

I wonder how many of us have the same attitude toward our infirmities and limitations as Aunt Florence Downey had. Those of us who knew Aunt Florence had our lives enriched by knowing and remembering her.