



This is the Steve Erwin Boardinghouse, ca. 1925. Standing on the front porch is Steve's wife, Armita Oney Erwin. Lurell Erwin is seated in the chair to Armita's right. Also, in front of the porch is Claude Erwin's dog, "Prince." Claude was Steve and Armita's grandson.

Erwin Family Name Has Place In Carter County History

*Steve Erwin Once Ran A Store,
Boardinghouse, And Stage Depot*

By Debbie Hatfield and John Erwin - 2001

Before the Civil War was fought and much blood was shed, a baby girl, Sophie Jones, was born June 25, 1844, in Scioto County, Ohio. During the Civil War, another baby, Oscar Erwin, was born August 10, 1862, in Carter County, Kentucky. These two children grew up, eventually met, fell in love, and married.

Sophie died in 1895, and Oscar buried her in Carter County, on a hill at Smokie, now known as the Oscar Erwin Cemetery. Oscar later joined his wife there, in 1915, where

they still rest, side-by-side.

Throughout their marriage, they had several children, but the one we want to tell you about is our great-grandfather, Steve Erwin. Born in Carter County, Kentucky, on November 8, 1873, he grew to be approximately six feet tall with dark hair and a build that showed he was not a stranger to hard work.

As a young man, Steve opened a store in Smokie, but found that the location of his store was not exactly convenient for customers. In fact, it took about a day to get in and out of that remote area by wagon and that was in the

Who will not suffer labor in this world, let him not be born. --John Florio

summertime. In the wintertime, it was another story entirely. So, Steve sold out part of his property in Smokie and looked for a better place to live.

In 1904 Steve bought 176 acres in Carter County for \$750. On this land were a house, barn, and a well. At one end of his property, Tygart Creek was on the left. A section of wide, flat bottomland with gently rolling hills was on the right. The land was easy to get to, because the Midland Trail wound its way through this property. The original house was small and run down, so a larger house was built for the family.

The Steve Erwin Boardinghouse opened ca. 1905-06, and the family began to take in boarders in the upstairs part of their home. These boarders were usually "drummers" (salesmen) and "drovers" (cowboys) who needed a room for a few nights.

The men got to their rooms via an outdoor staircase, just off from the summer kitchen at the back of the house. This exterior staircase insured privacy for the family who lived on the lower level of the house.

Steve's daughter, Virgie, recalls the summer kitchen, where the family did almost all of the cooking and canning. She told family members that the women would get up before dawn to cook for the boarders and family. She remembered spending much time there cooking and washing dishes.

Steve Erwin also owned a store across the road from his house. There he sold items needed in that day and time, like salted-down meat, kerosene, clothing, shoes, hardware items, and canning supplies. All the merchandise came via the railroad to Enterprise, Kentucky, where he picked up the freight and brought it to his store with horses and wagon. This was a trip of approximately four miles each way.

Behind the store and barn, corrals were built, so that drovers could keep their cattle safe, while staying at the boardinghouse. Hay for the stock came from Steve's land.

Steve's friend, Joe Miller, who is now in his nineties, still lives in Carter County. He remembers a baseball diamond on Steve's land, where anyone could join in on a baseball game on Sunday afternoons.

One thing that brought success to the boardinghouse and store was the fact that stage lines ran through that part of Carter County. Although there was no

set schedule when the stage coach would pass by, Steve Erwin had a deal with the stage line to feed its passengers and change the horses, whenever they came through close to his boardinghouse and store. This ensured more business for the Erwin family and further use of the Midland Trail.

Steve also bought and sold land in Carter County. On some of this land, he cut timber for lumber to sell. The longer sections of wood were sold to construct buildings. He used the shorter pieces to make barrel hoops, which he then sold to barrel makers.

Although Steve had many things that other people didn't have during that time, he was still susceptible to the same illnesses. He died on October 10, 1923, at the age of 50, of typhoid fever. It was a sudden illness and an isolated case in that area. He was buried at the Oscar Erwin Cemetery at Smokie, next to his father and mother.

Regrettably, the remoteness of the Smokie area made burying his wife, Armita, impossible. She died on January 6, 1948, and is buried at Garvin Ridge Cemetery, in Carter County.

In 1923 U. S. Route 60 was built through the middle of Steve's land, making the property easier to reach than ever before. Because of the vastness of his land, the house and property (in lots) were auctioned off in 1946.

As many as 30 to 40 homes now stand on what was once Steve Erwin's property. A few of the families living at Globe are his descendants.

Our father, Lowell Erwin, the youngest of six children, is the grandson of Steve Erwin. He was born to Mr. and Mrs. Wallace Erwin on August 16, 1934, on a road called Dry Branch, not far from where his grandfather (Steve) lived almost 100 years ago. He attended school at Upper Tygart Grade School.

When Dad was ten years old, his father, Wallace, died of cancer, one of the first people in Carter County to die from that disease. He lived with his mother until he met Senia Keaton, a pretty, dark-haired girl from Soldier, Kentucky. They married on June 25, 1955, and moved to New Castle, Indiana, where our father worked at Ingersoll Steel Company.

After working there for eight years, they moved back to Kentucky in 1962, and lived at Globe for awhile. They then moved to Dry Branch, where they built a house on the edge of the property where Dad was born. They live there still.



A family portrait of the Erwin family, taken around 1903 in Floyd County. Pictured (l-r): Oscar Erwin, Willis Erwin, Steve Erwin, Wallace Erwin, Virgie Erwin Howell, Armita Oney Erwin, and Carrie Erwin Kiser (daughter of Marion Erwin, who was a brother to Steve). (Photo courtesy of the author.)

On December 16, 1956, while living in Indiana, Lowell and Senia Erwin had a daughter, Debra Diane Erwin. After the family moved back to Kentucky in 1962, Debbie attended school at Upper Tygart Grade School and West Carter High School.

When she was 17, she married Randy Hatfield, of Prestonsburg. They lived three and a half years in Illinois, where they had a son, Timothy Randall Hatfield, on November 2, 1975.

Timothy married Allison Johnson, of Floyd County, on August 8, 1998. They live in Lexington. Debbie and Randy have lived in Prestonsburg, Floyd County, Kentucky, since September 1979.

On June 24, 1969, Lowell and Senia had another child, John Wallace Erwin. John grew up on Dry Branch and attended school at Upper Tygart Grade School and West Carter High School. When he was almost 21, he married Levina Walker. On April 9, 1994, John and Levina had a son, Travis Leonidas. They built a house in Olive Hill and moved there in October 1994.



In this photo, taken ca. 1915 in Floyd County, workers were making barrell hoops. Left to right: James McClury, Vergie Erwin, Lurell Erwin, Steve Erwin, Grace Erwin, and Wallace Erwin.

Debbie Hatfield, 29 Fifth Street, Prestonsburg, KY 41653; and John Erwin, 115 Jones Memorial Drive, Olive Hill, KY 41164, share this story and photographs with our readers.



1947 Sanders School (Carroll County, Kentucky) Graduting Class. James L. Cobb, III, P. O. Box 161, Sanders, KY 41083-0161, e-mail: jlc3@iglou.com, writes, "The third girl from the left is my aunt, Katherine J. Cobb. The teacher is Mrs. Bauer." Our thanks to Mr. Cobb for sharing this photo with our readers.