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LAURA  
FRANCES  
LEDBETTER  
NANCE THARP

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A Story of Her Life



DECEMBER 23, 2018  
FRANCES HARDWICK HAIRSTON  
Crawford, Mississippi

Laura Frances Ledbetter was born on a September day, September 4, 1840, when the flowering Golden Rod was a mass of bright yellow along fence rows and in fields. Blue Ageratum filled the ditches. Tall sunflowers swayed back and forth in the wind, and purple Ironweed stood head tall. Orange and yellow butterflies along with the larger monarch butterflies darted among the flowers. The cotton, corn, and sweet potatoes Laura's father, John McGee Ledbetter, had planted earlier were now ready to be harvested. Not quite fall but almost the end of summer, the sun was still intensely hot.

She was the first of her family to be born in Mississippi. Her older brother, Alexander Hamilton (1833) and two sisters, Mary (1834) and Martha (1835) were all born in Anson County, North Carolina before the family began their journey to the newly opened territory in northeast Mississippi as a result of the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek with the Choctaw Indians in 1832. Laura's grandparents, Gray (1776-1864) and Cecilia or Celia (1775-1856) Ledbetter along with her parents, John McGee (1802-1887) and Eliza White Hill (1817-1876) made the long journey from North Carolina to Mississippi to begin a new life in the year 1836.

Traveling with them were neighbors and relatives, the Randles, Smiths, Tilmans, Davidsons, Pritchards, Quinceys, and Johnsons. These same families had moved with them from Brunswick, Virginia to Anson County, North Carolina during the American Revolution when their property was threatened and plundered by the Tories. They helped to form a community in the southwestern part of Lowndes County. Their children married each other. They all played a part in the formation of the Methodist Church in the area.

Beginning a new life in a very raw area was difficult. Broox Sledge poetically stated in his book Dancing Rabbit "there were those who were quite willing to brave the loneliness, the blunt rawness, and the dangers to move into the gently rolling and vacant prairies across the Tombigbee River." The quest for a new opportunity pushed the settlers forward.

When the Ledbetters crossed the Tombigbee River at Columbus into the prairie, they must have been amazed at its vastness and the gently rolling land.



From Columbus, they still had another twenty to thirty miles to travel to get to their newly purchased land. On the way, they saw hundreds of different kinds of grasses, some taller than a man on horseback. They were amazed at large numbers of wildflowers in an array of colors from magentas to pinks to blues to oranges, yellows and to whites. They saw oak, hickory, sweet gum, catalpa, and bois d'arc trees in large numbers. The trees would provide them material to build houses and barns. The bois d'arc tree, a very hard wood which would not rot, was used to make fence posts. The grasses would supply them with hay to feed their livestock.

It must have been very difficult for Laura's mother. Not only did she have three children all under the age of four and now a new baby, but she had to live in very crude conditions until a bigger and better house could be built. It was important that land be developed first; therefore, a small cabin was quickly constructed. Logs cut from trees cleared for new land were used to build a simple dog trot house. A dog trot house consisted of a large open hall down the

middle and two larger rooms on each side. These cabins were built with split logs with the oval side cast down and the smooth placed upward. Sometimes the floors were just hard packed dirt. Laura's life began in a cabin. It would be several years before a bigger house was built.

Like other early pioneers, the Ledbetter family was very resourceful. Laura's mother and grandmother learned to supply their own household items. Gourds became dippers or buckets. Wood ash was saved and mixed with lye to make soap. Candles were molded from tallow fat from cattle. Eliza had two spinning wheels, one for wool and one for flax so that she could make a fabric called 'linsey/ woolsey'. Eliza and Celia made clothes for the family from this rough fabric.

Laura and her sisters were taught gardening, cooking, spinning, weaving, mending, sewing, and soap and candle making. By helping their mother, they also learned how to manage a household.

The first few years food was scant except for wild game, especially deer meat. Without fresh vegetables, the diet was very monotonous. According to Judge J. V. Carr, an early settler in Crawford, people suffered from the lack of food. He tells of being sick of eating nothing but deer meat. "They baked it and they biled it and they stewed it. I got so sick of it I could not retain it in my stomach." In the early spring, wild mustard was cooked with dandelion leaves to make a 'mess of greens'. As the years passed, vegetable gardens and fruit trees provided fresh fruits and vegetables. Herbs were planted for cooking and for medicine.

Women learned to depend on herbs for medicines and used remedies passed down from their mothers. A poultice was made from wild mustard, poplar root, and red sumac. This combination could also be

used to make teas and powders. A standard cure for a chest cold was to rub the chest with goose grease and to apply a mustard plaster.

More and more babies were being born. When Laura was two, she had a new sister, Sarah Margaret who was born in 1842. Two years later Emily "Em" Catherine was born in 1844. But it was also a time of sadness. Her older sister Mary died in 1844 at ten years of age. A second brother, John McGee "Jack" was born in 1846 followed by another sister, Leticia "Tish" in 1848. Laura was called "Lollie" by her family.

Life was a struggle. There were many complications, but a place to gather to worship and to share was desired. The closest Methodist churches were in Columbus and in Pickinsville, Alabama, much too far to travel. Circuit Rider preachers were sent from the Alabama Conference to serve the needs of and to convert the settlers. One of the Circuit Riders was George Shaeffer for whom Shaeffer's Chapel is named.

Some of the men from the Crawford area got together and purchased Prairie Hill Church and Campground near Penn Station north of Crawford. Every August, families would pack belongings, their children, and enough food to last for a week to attend the camp meeting at the Prairie Hill Campground. The meeting began on Monday evening and closed the following Monday morning. This week was the only time the people would see a minister for a year. It was a week of revival preaching and socializing.

Imagine how exciting this week was for Laura and her siblings. Many tents were built and occupied each year in close proximity allowing the Ledbetter children to run and play with many other children, laughing and sharing secrets. The women

cooked some of their best food and were only too happy to share recipes and stories. It was a great time for Eliza, Laura's mother, to be with other women and equally so for John McGee, Laura's father, to discuss politics and crops with other men. But it was also a time for serious conversion.

Dr. William Lipscomb mentions in his History of Columbus that he was proud to call this campground his spiritual birth place in 1849. "This camp meeting was distinguished for the generous hospitality of its tenters, the large number of visitors reaching up to the thousands, and its sweeping revivals of religion."

As Laura was growing up in the 1840's and 1850's, she saw many changes. More and more people were beginning to move into the area. Crawford was increasing in population and was named Crawfordsville for the Reverend Peter Crawford. A post office was established in 1842 at Dailey's Crossroads or Wayside Inn, a stagecoach stopover, owned and operated by John



Dailey. The inn was located on Robinson Road which connected this part of the state to Jackson in central Mississippi.

With the increasing population in Crawford, there was a need for stores where staples could be purchased: sugar, flour. Laura's parents and grandparents grew much of their own food, but they did need to buy staples. Farm tools were also available for the farmers. John Deere invented the steel plow that could cut through the thick prairie grasses and turn up the rich black soil.

Four more children were born into the Ledbetter household in the 1850's. Patrick Lorenza "Punch" (1850), Clarendia "Clara" (1853), Leon "Shep" (1856), and Lillie (1859). Laura was nineteen when her last sister was born. The baby Punch only lived for one year, but the small cabin was beginning to outgrow itself with all of the additional babies. Laura's father cleared more land and increased his crops. More money was coming into the household. A new house could be built.



A site was chosen that was a little higher than other land around it. The site was close to the road which had to be taken care of by John McGee Ledbetter, the landowner. Each landowner was responsible for the maintenance of the road that passed by his land. Bricks for the chimney were handmade from clay from the bank of the nearby creek on the property. The bricks were mixed with dried grasses and dried in the sun. The new house had two columns on the front porch, an entrance into a large open hallway and four large rooms on the first floor. A stairway led to the second floor for additional bedrooms. The kitchen was at the back of the house connected by a covered walkway. The children eagerly watched the foundation being built and the walls rising. It was an exciting time for Laura and her brothers and sisters and especially so for her mother. She could at last feel the luxury of a larger space without the crowded conditions of the cabin.

With more people populating the area, a parsonage and a new Methodist church were built in Crawford also in the

1850's. Church was very important to the family. Two of Laura's great uncles, Charles and Drury Ledbetter, were Methodist ministers in North Carolina. Rarely did Laura's family miss a Sunday although there were times the road to Crawford was almost impassable. According to minutes from the 1859 Quarterly Conference, John McGee Ledbetter was elected as a trustee.

The church was the center of social as well as religious life for the community of Crawford. It was the place for community gatherings, for Christmas entertainment, for Dinner on the Ground, and for Sunday School. It was a place where you could see your neighbors on Sunday morning. The church membership was growing. With the development of the railroad in Crawford, the world was enlarging.

J. V. Carr deeded land to the Mobile and Ohio Railroad in the 1850's to build a railroad through Crawford. The railroad allowed a quicker way for crops to get to market and for supplies to be brought in. Cotton was bringing a good price. The economy was growing allowing for more people to enlarge their houses and add front porches.

A school for males and females was established in Crawford in the 1850's. This building was used until 1927 when a more modern brick building was erected. Much progress was happening in the area. However, although a railroad, a stage coach line, and steamboats on the Tombigbee River miles away brought the world closer, Crawford was a closely-knit community. Crawford was the center of their world and would continue to be so for years.

Laura's grandmother, Celia, died in 1856 when Laura was sixteen years old. It was another sad time for the family. Celia helped her daughter-in-law, Eliza, raise the many children. She helped make their

clothes and teach Laura and her sisters how to do sewing including lace making and tatting. Celia and Gray lived next door to their son John McGee. Gray helped his son farm. Celia was born in Brunswick County, Virginia in 1775 and moved with her family to Anson County, North Carolina during the American Revolution. In 1836 a further change was made in her life when she and her husband with their sons moved to Mississippi. Celia was a child during the American Revolution. She experienced the growth of a new nation. Celia saw the beginning expansion of the United States from thirteen colonies on the eastern seaboard to the expansion west of the Mississippi River and to the establishment of new states being formed. She saw the growth of the rail system. More important than anything, she lived next door to her grandchildren and was a significant part of their growing up.

In 1859 Laura is nineteen years old. Young men were already beginning to leave calling cards for her and her sister, Sarah Margaret. One young man Laura was especially attracted to was William Cornelius "Neely" Nance. Neely's parents owned a farm where Alice Hairston and Bill Edwards now live on what is now Fire Tower Road. His father, Simeon Nance from North Carolina died in 1848, and his mother, Martha Mitchener, died in 1859. They are buried at the Bethel Church property. Neely's sister Eleanor married George Tharp from Deer Brook. (George Tharp was a brother to Henry Tharp who later married Laura.) On November 30, 1860, Laura and Neely married when he was twenty-two and she was twenty.

Cotton was bringing good prices. The economy was good. The Industrial Revolution began in England and made its way to New England in the United States. With improved machinery and factories,

there was a need for more and more cotton, but there was dissension in the country. Cotton was shipped to the mills in New England and to England. New England wanted the cotton, but they were unhappy with the expansion of slavery into the newly formed states. The south insisted in states' rights. Louder and louder grew the arguments. Rumors of war were heard throughout the land. On January 9, 1861 Mississippi seceded from the Union. The Prairie Guards, Company E, was organized on February 15, 1861. Neely Nance and Henry Tharp were among many of the Crawford men to sign up. Even the Methodist minister in Crawford enlisted.

While the men were drilling with Captain J. T. W. Hairston, newly graduated from Virginia Military Institute, the women were meeting in Crawford making a new flag with the insignia, *Prairie Guards*, attached to the middle of the flag. Laura helped make the flag to support her new husband and her brother, Alexander Hamilton. The women of Crawford spent a lot of time making and selling pies and cakes to have money to buy a fine material to create the flag. Everyone seemed to be in a jovial mood thinking that surely the South would win and all would be over in a few months.

Such was the mood when eighty-seven newly enlisted young men, dressed in Confederate uniforms, and their families gathered in Crawford on April 27, 1861 to hoist the new flag. As the flag was attached to the staff, Captain W.W. Humphries stated most eloquently: "This momentous day we unfurl this flag to the glad breezes that fan these broad prairies of east Mississippi." He praised the handsome uniforms and the drilling ability of Captain Hairston. Captain Humphries thanked the ladies of Crawford for all of their efforts in raising money for the flag. After the local school girls' choir

sang *The Volunteers' Welcome Home*, everyone went to the church yard where the ladies of Crawford had set out a bountiful meal. Captain Humphries made one last statement crediting the people of Crawford: "Everything that was good was prepared in a manner to do credit to the taste of the good and clever people of Crawford."

Laura and Neely had a few months together before he and other Prairie Guards would depart from Crawford. The men all thought they would be able to "whip the yankees" quickly. After all, they had all been crack shots with a rifle since they were boys. Squirrel, rabbit, and deer meat were often on the tables as food. Neely assured his new bride he would be home soon.

The morning of May 11, 1861 came too soon. Laura and Neely were at the depot in Crawford along her parents to see their oldest son, Lt. A. H. Ledbetter, depart for four years of fighting. The train switched into the siding at the Crawford station. Captain Hairston gave the command, "Mount the train." Family members quickly hugged and held back tears as their sons, husbands, and brothers clambered above the train that carried them to Columbus and on to Corinth, Mississippi.

In Corinth, the Prairie Guards, Company E, joined with the other units comprising the 11<sup>th</sup> Mississippi Voluntary Infantry Regiment. The regiment trained in Corinth for a few weeks before they were shipped to northern Virginia. In Virginia they fought in many battles: Harpers Ferry, Sharpsburg, Manassas, Seven Pines, Gaines Mill, Antietam Bridge. The 11<sup>th</sup> Regiment was organized in February, 1861. The men who were not killed in these many battles, fought until the end of the war.

Except for the exchange of letters, Laura and Neely never saw each again. Neely was killed at the Battle of Seven Pines

in Virginia in 1862. After the Battle of Seven Pines, the Mississippi Regiment fought in the Battle at Gettysburg. The Mississippi Regiment suffered an eighty-seven percent casualty loss. All of the University Grays died. Many of the other units also suffered many losses. Henry Tharp, a cousin of Neely Nance, was wounded and lived to fight many more battles before he was taken prisoner in Petersburg, Virginia. Tharp entered the war as a private and acted as an orderly. When his sergeant was killed at Gettysburg, Henry was promoted to sergeant.

Back in Crawford in 1863, the war is taking its toll in the Ledbetter household. At twenty-two, Laura is a widow. Her fifteen-year old brother Jack, anxious to follow his brother, runs away from home and joins the army in 1862. A year later in May, 1863, sixteen-year old Jack is in Vicksburg, Mississippi when General Grant sieged the city and held its citizens hostage until July 4, 1863. General Grant admired the fighting ability of the southern soldiers, but they were completely outnumbered by the North. General Grant told the Confederate soldiers to surrender. There were no terms. They were to leave and return to their homes.

Laura's father, on learning that the soldiers were returning from the battle of Vicksburg, went to Crawford. He watched other men, men he had known since they were children straggling in. The men left with an air of confidence. They returned broken in spirit. But Jack Ledbetter was not among the men, to the disappointment of his father.

John McGee Ledbetter did not give up. He set out to find his son. The war had ravaged the state. Many of the bridges, train tracks, and roads were destroyed. John made his way through thick woods, cane brakes and bayous looking for his son. He stopped anyone to ask if they had seen Jack. Finally,

he saw one bedraggled Confederate soldier trying to return home. The soldier recognized the name and told Mr. Ledbetter he could find his son on the porch of an old black woman. "I don't think he will live much longer, and he is certainly not the fat little boy you think he is," the soldier told the anxious father. Jack was in dire straits. When he left home, he weighed 150 pounds. Now, his weight was 85 pounds. He slept on a cot on the porch of the woman's house and crawled down the steps to a branch of water to get a drink of water, straining the water through a mosquito netting. The woman told Mr. Ledbetter to come look at the boy. "He is probably your son. Jack's father looked at the boy and replied, "He does not look like the boy I saw three years ago, but I am going to take him home to my wife and see if she thinks she is his mother. If not, we are going to keep him anyway."

True enough, the family did not at first recognize Jack, but they carefully nursed him back to health. For a week, they fed him just milk and mush. After a week, his mother and sisters prepared him a bunch of batter cakes. Jack commented, "That was the best food I have ever tasted." Certainly, this was probably true since he had very little to eat in the past few months. In September with his health regained, Jack returned to the fighting. This time he was sent to Mobile and later into Tennessee. He stayed with the war until the end. He lived to the age of ninety-six.

Life was difficult for the Ledbetter family during the war years. Cotton prices were very low. It was hard to find labor as slaves were freed in 1863. Staples such as sugar and coffee were not available. Laura with her mother and sisters learned to substitute coffee by roasting corn, peanuts, okra seeds or even acorns then grinding it. Sugar was made from molasses which was made from grinding sugar cane and boiling

the syrup. Salt was scraped from smoke house floors and used sparingly.

The soldiers returned to a broken world. They saw many of their friends killed or wounded. They wore tattered clothes and slept on the ground summer and winter. Very little food was available for them to eat. They left to fight for a cause, but they were outnumbered. Those who lived fought to the end, April, 1865.

It was in June of 1865 that Henry Tharp was released from a Yankee prison in Virginia. He was issued clothes and transportation back to his home, his parent's home in the Prairie Point Community in Noxubee County. For the next five years, Henry's concern was to find a normalcy in a changed world.

Henry like all of his friends who fought for the South returned to a land devastated by war. The economy was at a all time low in Mississippi. Cotton prices were very low. The storeowners in Crawford and surrounding communities suffered because they depended on the landowners. For the farmers, there was no money for new seed, supplies or labor. The slaves were freed presenting a new concern. Federal military rule loomed over the land.

White men were especially vulnerable. They were not allowed to vote and be a citizen of the United States until the southern states ratified the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment which gave African Americans the right to be citizens and protected them from discriminatory state laws. Congress next passed the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment giving Negroes the right to vote. The South was divided into five military areas watched over by Federal soldiers. The period of Reconstruction lasted until 1870.

With African Americans having the right to vote and outnumbering the white men who could vote, the African Americans

became office holders from the United States Senator to United States Representatives to local supervisors and sheriffs. Adelbert Ames, a carpetbagger from the north, was elected governor. Judges, juries, all law was in the hands of the African Americans. If anyone said anything against the Black people, the federal troops defended the Blacks. The Blacks were proud of their new independence, but they became arrogant. Riots, begun by the Blacks to intimidate the white people, were suppressed.

White men like Henry Tharp, who was a returning defeated Confederate soldier, had to deal with a shortage of labor. Former slaves had lived on the plantation and were under the control of the slave owner. Things were now different. The freed Blacks could find an employer and move every year if he wanted to or if the landowner chose to move him. The system of sharecropping was the new order of labor. A Sharecropper would rent a portion of land that he and his family would work until harvest. At harvest, the sharecropper was given one third of the crop.

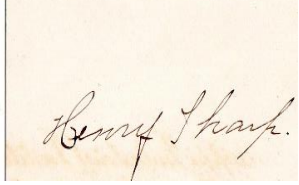
Without much money, the landowners and the sharecroppers lived on credit. They were dependent on the store owners. This credit led to debt and loss of land by the landowners and for the blacks being deeper and deeper in debt. The North was experiencing an Industrial Revolution, but agriculture ruled in the South making it very difficult to make a comeback.

Gradually, by 1870 the economy was turning around and military rule was gone in the South. However, the Methodist Church in Crawford suffered a setback as there were no ministers in Crawford from 1870-1878. Laura is a widow living with her parents near Crawford. One by one, Laura's sisters and brothers are getting married. Henry Bond Tharp, who is five feet eight inches



tall and has black hair and blue eyes and was a cousin of Neely Nance, began to call on

Laura.

A rectangular image showing a handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Henry Tharp". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored, slightly textured paper background.

On December 13, 1870, Laura Ledbetter Nance and Henry Bond Tharp (November 15, 1834) were united in marriage. Henry wore a black silk top hat on his wedding day. The hat was always kept in a hat box which was later placed in the attic of the Ledbetter house. Years later, Carolyn Hairston Blair Henderson, great granddaughter of Henry, was given the hat. Today, it is housed in the S. D. Lee Home in Columbus. Laura and Henry lived in Noxubee County in the Prairie Point Community. He farmed with his father, Henry Tharp and with his brother, George. Henry Tharp married Mary B. Nance (Henry Bond Tharp's parents) on April 3, 1827 in Wake County, North Carolina. In the 1840's, the family moved to the Prairie Point Community in Noxubee County, Mississippi. His brother George was married to Neely Nance's sister, Blanche.

George William Tharp, Henry's brother, and his wife lived in the Deerbrook Community in Noxubee County. "He and his wife were noted for their generous hospitality. He was very fond of children and his large, old fashioned carriage was often filled with boys and girls. He often carried them to his country home to eat watermelons or peaches. Ever bright and cheerful, he was so liberal in his gifts to the church and Sunday School it was said 'that his pocket book was converted when he joined the church'."

Lillie was the first child of Laura and Henry. She was born on August 5, 1871 and was called Pennie or Aunty by her nieces and nephews. Ela May, another daughter

was born on October 27, 1872. By the time the third child was born on September 1, 1878, all hopes of having a son were forgotten. This child a daughter was given the name of her father, Henry. She was referred to "Little Aunty" by her nieces and nephews.

The family became members of the McLeod Church, a Cumberland Presbyterian Church located in southeastern Noxubee County. The girls went to school in Brooksville, but Ela was later sent to Calera, Alabama to live with her cousin, Freddie Scales Terrel and her minister husband and two sons.

Laura taught her daughters how to cook and to sew, all of the skills she herself was taught by her grandmother and mother. Ela as a wife and mother made all of her daughters' clothes and did fine needlework until her death in 1962.

Although Reconstruction was basically over by 1875, most people had a hard time economically. To make ends meet, the family moved to Brooksville where Laura operated a boarding house. Boarding houses became a means for a married or widowed woman to earn a living in the period from 1875-1920. It was considered degrading for a woman to have a job, but caring for boarders was seen as an extension of her domestic duties. Rooms were rented out mainly to drummers (traveling salesmen). The proprietor provided them with meals and a place to stay. Foods commonly found in boarding houses were regular home cooked meals which the boarders were accustomed to. Corn bread, biscuits, fried meats, fried chicken, boiled dinners, butterbeans, eggs, banana pudding, rice pudding, coffee, and tea were common fare.

Laura bought everything from the stores in bulk. Staples such as flour, sugar,

molasses, coffee, and tea were all in large containers in the store. Anything purchased was measured, wrapped in paper and tied with a string. In Crawford or in Brooksville, she could purchase bolts of calico or cotton madras fabric to make dresses. Ribbons were sold. Usually women made their own lace by crocheting or by tatting. Hats were an important part of a woman's wardrobe. In the 1870's hats were worn tilted forward and were made of straw, silk, lace, velvet, wool, and fur. They were trimmed with lace, flowers, feathers, beads, and sometimes birds.

On November 12, 1883, Henry Tharp died leaving Laura for the second time a widow, but this time she has three young daughters to provide for and to educate. Henry, born on November 15, 1834, was forty-nine years when he died. Laura was forty-three. Ela was eleven years old at the time of her father's death. By 1885, Laura's mother was deceased, but her father and brothers and sisters were all living in or near Crawford. Laura moved her boarding house business to Crawford where other businesses were being redeveloped.

On August 17, 1883, according to an entry in the diary of James Nance, the town of Crawford burned. All of the stores were wooden framed buildings and were located on the western edge of town. Mr. Nance's recording and an article appearing in the Memphis Commercial Appeal August 18, 1883 provide a primary source report of the fire.

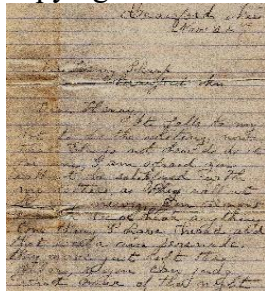
In a period from 1883-1885 following the fire, new stores were built on the eastern edge of Crawford near the railroad. New life was coming back into town. Crigler, Hairston, Potts, Ervin, Richards, and Bragg were listed as merchants. The town was incorporated in 1885.

Laura built a large rambling house across the street from her brother, Shep. She rented out three rooms in the house to traveling salesmen. Laura and her daughter, Pennie, occupied two large bedrooms. Pennie or Lillie never married but remained with her mother until Laura died in 1916. She helped Laura take care of the guests. Laura May Hairston Cotton related that Aunty played the piano quite well, but she was a quiet and withdrawn person. She felt ill at ease around men and would never be seen by men except by accident. When her mother died in 1916, it was remarkable she went to Memphis with a written introduction from her brother-in-law, George W. Hairston, to work in the Eli Lillie Drug Company until she retired. She remained in Memphis until she died and is buried in the Hairston plot in Oaklimb Cemetery in Crawford.

"Grand-Ma sent Little Aunty (Henry) to Meridian to a business college where she met Ormand Kimbrough from Scooba," relates Laura May. They lived in Scooba in the beginning of their marriage, but later they moved to Crawford and lived in the old Nance house. Ormand farmed. They were the parents of two daughters, Ela and Laura. Henry became ill and died at an early age when her youngest daughter was a toddler. Laura, with the help of her daughter Ela, took care of her granddaughters until Ormand returned to Scooba where his mother and sister could help raise the girls.

The following is a letter (circa 1895) Laura wrote to her daughter, Henry. I am

copying from Laura's handwriting:



Crawford, Mississippi

November 24

Mrs. Henry Tharp

Crawford, Mississippi

Dear Henry,

It falls to my lot to do the writing, now that Ela is not here to do it for me. I am afraid you will not be satisfied with my letters as they will not be very newsy. You know that I never see or hear anything. One thing I have heard, and that was a nice serenade. They have just left the gallery (porch). If you can judge what hour of the night it is. It is now 10:00. Pennie has gone to bed and I am all alone. I have Mr. Gay and Mr. Daniels. They are still here. They are still up. Mr. Love is with us, but he will leave on the 1 o'clock train. Hope it will not rain before that time.

The young people had a dance at the Armory on Friday night. I believe there were seven couples, Alice Willie, Lee, Nettie, Miss Snoden, Miss Cox, and two grand ladies from Mr. Turners were the ladies. You can guess at the boys. Mr. Gay looked on for awhile but soon tired and came home. He went home Sunday and was caught in the rain and had to carry his wheels on his back three or four miles. He was tired out when he reached home. H came in about 7 o'clock. Had supper waiting for him.

Ela had a card from Henry Freeman Sunday eve. I was sorry she was not here to answer it. I answered it and expressed my regrets at her not being here to receive him. I thought they all knew she had gone to Aberdeen. I certainly miss her, but we are getting along as well as I could wish.

I am feeling so much better now. I've had a bad cold, but that is well now. You would be surprise to see how Pennie helps me. She is real nice about it. Sallie is still with me but she is worthless. I would drive her off, but Ela is so anxious for me to keep her until she comes back.

I reckon you have heard that Louis had quit working for Mr. Nance. They had a little fuss and Louis left and went out home. I reckon it was best for him to leave. He told Jammie what he thought of him before he left. I don't know what he will do next year.

The Dr. is still with us, and I so tired of looking at him. We had two or three drummers [salesmen] every day last week. Hope we will have as many this week.

Bud is progressing rapidly with Adam's house, but I don't think they can move in before Christmas. Mrs. Green is no better, but her granddaughter Fannie is with her now. I am glad she is with her.

I know you are tired of this letter. There is nothing new in it, but then you will hear from home. I am hoping you and Ela can take Thanksgiving dinner with me. I don't expect to have anything more than turkey and oysters. I don't care for the turkey but with the oysters. I must close now. It is near 12 o'clock and I am not sleepy but must go to bed.

Write soon to

Mamie

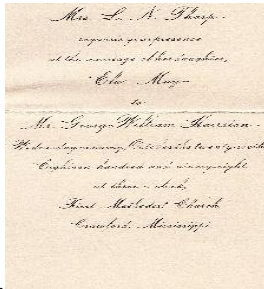
The Armory, as referenced in Laura's letter, was a large frame building across the street from the stores in Crawford. The National Guard used the building for the storage of arms. At the south end of the building was a large stage. When the building was no longer needed as an armory, it was used as a recreation hall where dances were held several times a year. Young people came from miles around to enjoy the music of the good dance bands. Later school plays and other functions were held in the armory.

George William Hairston, twice a widower, lives in Crawford. His first wife, Mary Watt Hairston, died giving birth to their daughter, Kizzie.

A few years later he married he married Antionette Ervin. They had five children, two sets of twins: Robert Ervin, Antionette (Nettie) and Nannie Montague who was deformed when she was born, and finally

George whose twin and mother died at childbirth. George Hairston has four young children to take care of. He needs a wife. He is a large landowner, owns the gin and stores in Crawford, and has a buggy business.

He became acquainted with Ela May Tharp, daughter of Laura Tharp and fifteen years George's junior. He is forty-one. George courted her with letters and attention. She finally agrees to marry him. Mrs. L. N. Tharp sent out invitations requesting "your presence" at the marriage of her daughter to Mr. George William Hairston, Wednesday evening, October 27, 1898 at 3:00 at the Methodist Church in



Crawford.

Their first child, Laura May, was born on July 20, 1899. Wortley Mosley, another daughter, was born on November 1, 1901. George built a new large house near downtown Crawford for his growing family.



Henry Tharp was born September 15, 1904. Henry died at the age of two on August 28, 1906, a little blond, blue eyed toddler. Meanwhile, George's older son, Robert Ervin died about the same time when he was in his teens. George's oldest daughter, Kizzie, fondly known as Sister Kizzie, died leaving behind a one-year old daughter, Margaret Witherspoon, and a husband. Margaret went to live with her father in Tennessee. It was a sad time for the family.

Meanwhile, three more sons were born to George and Ela. Brown Constantine was born on September 12, 1907. Nicholas Edward was born on September 27, 1909, and the last child, John Peter, was born on December 22, 1912. Ela was forty years old when Peter was born. George was fifty-five.



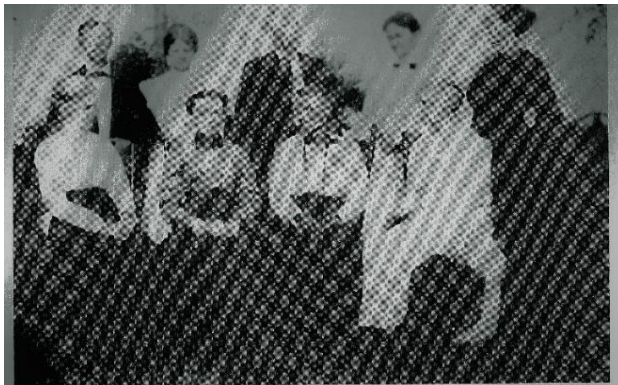
Laura lived to know eight grandchildren. She helped take care of the first two granddaughters for a short while. Since she lived very close to Ela, she knew the other six grandchildren as well as the stepchildren of Ela. By now Crawford was a growing incorporated town with several stores, a bank, gin, school, and a Methodist Church, Laura's brother Shep also owned a store downtown



John McGee, another brother, was county supervisor. He remained in office for thirty years. John was also superintendent of the Sunday Schools at the Crawford Methodist church,

The Methodist Church, built in the 1850, burned and was replaced with another church in 1911. The church was an integral part of the community. Many Sunday

afternoons, the sisters and brothers and cousins of Laura gathered on Ela's Laura's or Shep's porch, and as Ela said "chew the same old rag" as they discussed happenings of the day or something from the past. Laura was surrounded by family in Crawford. She lived a long life of service. She died November 18, 1916 when the oak trees, the hickory trees and the sweet gum trees were orange and golden yellow and red, a great contrast against the dark green cedar trees. Laura is buried in the Ledbetter Cemetery with her family on Tarlton Road near Crawford, Mississippi.



*Front row, left to right, Clara Ledbetter Hartman, Letitia [Tish] Ledbetter Henkel, Laura Ledbetter Tharp, Mattie [Ma] Ledbetter Smith; back row, left to right, Shep Ledbetter, Ida Ledbetter, Jack Ledbetter, Maggie Ledbetter, Lillie Ledbetter Puller.*

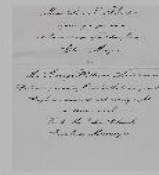
Laura Ledbetter and her siblings

(left to right), Clara Ledbetter Hartman,  
Letitia Ledbetter Henkel, Laura Ledbetter  
Tharp, Mattie Ledbetter Smith

Back row, (left to right), Shep Ledbetter, Ida  
Crymes Ledbetter, Jack Ledbetter, Maggie  
Randal Ledbetter, Lillie Ledbetter Puller



Walden Quilt block made by Julia  
Troy in her collection 1890



Walden Quilt block made by  
Julia and the family 1890



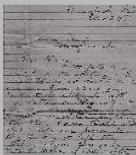
Striped fabric in a rowing



Walden Quilt block  
This was the block of the S.D. Lee House in  
Columbia, Mississippi.



Walden Quilt block  
This was the block of the S.D. Lee House in  
Columbia, Mississippi.



Handwritten text from Julia Lee



Walden Quilt block



Walden Quilt block made by Julia Lee



Walden Quilt block made by Julia Lee

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Dr. Jack Elliot

Rufus Ward

This paper about Laura Ledbetter is the first of a series I am working on about my four great grandmothers and my husband's, Lamar Hairston, four great grandmothers. I have been collecting material for the last five years about these women, but for some reason I began first to really write in earnest about one of Lamar's great grandmothers. Perhaps I chose her first because she grew up across the road from where I have lived for the past fifty-five years. My husband grew up here, and together we reared our three children in this location. I became one with the discoveries of the area's unfolding history and the excitement I feel when I see all of the flowers and grasses the area has to offer.

I have a file on each great great grandmother, but to be honest Laura's file was very slim. As I began to write, I was amazed at the amount of material I uncovered. Lamar's cousin, Carolyn Blair Henderson, deserves much credit for collecting and assimilating materials as she worked on the needed proof to get into the Daughters of American Revolution with Charles Ledbetter as one of her patriot ancestors.

My sister-in-law, Alice Hairston Edwards, gave me a laptop writing desk which belonged to her grandmother, Ela Tharp Hairston. At first, feeling as if I were intruding on a very private space. I timidly opened the desk to look inside. But once I began writing the paper, I revisited the desk and discovered a treasure trove of material: personal letters, cards, and beautiful handkerchiefs handmade by Laura's daughter, Ela.

The more I wrote, the more I discovered. As a history major, all of these materials are very exciting to me. My purpose in writing this series is to acquaint my children, grandchildren, and great grandchild with their ancestors. I want them

to know more than names on a genealogy chart. I want them to know what was happening in their lives, events, surroundings, and work. These eight women are all very significant. Although these women all come from different places and different backgrounds, they are united with a common thread. They were all born about the same time. They all married and had children about the same time. Their families migrated to Mississippi in the early 1800's. The Civil War was a part of their lives. They saw many changes take place. Several of them lost husbands or children. They suffered through many hardships, but they persevered. Each of these women was strong and independent. From my research, I certainly discovered this independence and strength in Laura.

Until I wrote this paper, the Ledbetter family and certainly Laura were just vague figures. I was acquainted with their names and knew my husband was a descendant, but after all of the research I feel that I really know Laura. I walked with Laura through her childhood, her marriages, and raising her daughters. I became one with her as she managed her boarding houses. I imagined the conversation that must have taken place on the front porches on Sunday afternoons. When you do this much research, you become one with the characters and even wake up in the middle of the night thinking about them. I only I have been able to portray Laura as she deserves to be.

Frances Hardwick Hairston

December, 2018



