

IRMO, S.C., was a small country town as I grew up there. The railroad ran north and south through the center of town with a side-track running about a half mile of the one square mile town limits. The siding almost always contained railroad cars waiting to be picked up or to be loaded or unloaded. Irmo had a large Depo to handle Freight and Passengers. The Depot Agent/Manager was my Aunt Daisy Nunamaker. I remember the Depot was still in operation in the early 1960's, because my large Hi-Fi speakers came by rail freight there.

There was a water tower near the Depot to refill the boiler on the steam engine. They towed the fuel (wood or coal) in the car behind the train engine. The trains always pulled a little Red Caboose at the end of each train for the switchman. In about the 1950's, the railroad changed to Diesel Engines.

The pulpwood was loaded on the waiting R.R. cars by hand, from trucks that had been loaded by hand in the woods by the same men. Pulpwood was usually cut into four foot bolts. The ground around that area was always covered with a thick layer of tree bark.

The carload of coal for fuel would stay on the siding to be unloaded by hand. Chutes in the bottom of the train car would open to let the coal fall out to be shoveled into bags, trucks, or trailors for sale.

Mr. James A. Leitner (in 2011 is over 103 years young) would unload the entire car by hand with his very large coal shovel. This took a few weeks part-time. He made the deliveries in his G.M.C. pickup truck. J. A. Leitners' General Merchandise Store stood across St. Andrews Road from the Train Depot on the South corner by Fork Avenue. It burned in the 1970's. On the North corner of Fork Avenue and St. Andrews Road is where the old Post Office was located in the former Lorick's Store. It was built high on pilings of logs and large blocks of stacked wood cubes. This was done to be up to street level (St. Andrews Road- dirt road at the time). Up until about the 1930's, bulk food stuffs were among some of the items shipped in large wooden barrels. The material in the barrels that was liquid or fine enough to pour (syrup, sugar, etc.) was stolen from Lorick's Store by driving a wagon filled with empty barrels under the store. Then they would drill a hole up through the floor and the bottom of the barrel in the store, and the contents would drain down into the empty barrels in the wagon-(horse drawn of course). Their Money Safe was also broken into by peeling off the metal face to get into the lock mechanism.

I saw the holes in the floor, and the old safe in that condition. Of course it was the Irmo Post Office then, and Mother's Sister, Sybil Nunamaker was Postmaster.

Aunt Sybil bought the old Post Office (and lot), and built a new Post Office on the site. This time filling in and pouring cement slab for the block building.

She also bought the old Cotton Gin property behind the Post Office from Mr. Roland Meetze and Mr. Joeby Bouknight, where she built her Home on Fork Avenue.

The story was told about my Grand Father, Olin Nunamaker.

One day when he was at the Irmo Gin with some of his cotton (close to the turn of 19th century, 1900). A small Black Man was standing by one of his 400 pound bales of cotton. And he told the man that if he could carry the bale to the other end of the Gin that he could have it. When he got there with the bale, after he backed up to it and lifted it onto his back, he asked where he should take it now. And Grandfather told him to take it home with him.

The Irmo Cotton Gin was still in operation in the 1940's. I could see the smoke from the smokestacks from our front porch on the hill (now west Lake Murray Blvd.).

In 2006, a Century-21 office was built on Fork Avenue= the old Gin and P.O. site.

Additional notes to Aunt Sybil's and post office history.

She somehow educated herself, and got her Teachers' Certificate.

Then she taught her baby sister (my Mother) in the third grade in school. I do not know how she and Mother survived before Mom & Dad got married, unless Uncle Carlisle helped with his Navy pay, along with their garden and chickens.

Uncle Carlisle lived with us after he retired with 31 years service in the Navy. During the time with us, he built his home on the land he inherited on Hwy. 60, across the Hwy. from our property. He later built a Mobile Home Park on about three acres of his land. He continued to live in his home until his death about 1965. A few years before he died, he sold the Park to Everett Folk, who lived adjacent to the Park. It was his Dad that we picked cotton for.

When Aunt Sybil was about 50 years old, she studied for the Postal Exam (for Postmaster) and scored higher than the Acting Postmaster and a College Graduate to win the Postmaster Job in Irmo. In 1949 (August), she was appointed Postmaster by President Harry S. Truman.

One day at the P.O., a young girl reached through an open flimsy lattice type door that Aunt Sybil almost never latched into the cash drawer- got some money and ran. It was said that The F.B.I. found the money hidden in a junk pile in a tin can.

It was the early 1950's before Irmo had paved streets or telephones in homes. The first phone we had at home was an 8 party line, which all 8 partys could pick up their phone at the same time and listen if they were that rude. Everyone had a different ring, but all phones would ring. Or at least others did ring with yours. And nobody could use their phone to make a call until they all hung-up their phones. For years before this, the only public phone in town was in a phonebooth inside Leitner's Store. To call Lexington, S.C.

was long distance even after we got home phones. And the call had to be put through the switchboard in the Powerhouse at the Lake Murray Dam.

By the way, the name of the railroad through Irmo was the C.N.&L. (Columbia, Newberry, & Laurens Railroad).

I'm sure you have heard the story of how Irmo got it's name: For what it is worth, here it is again: Two letters were taken from the first of the last names of the two surveyers, Irving and Mosely, who charted the path the railroad would take. They named the area crossroads and sidetracks: IRMO. Now Highway 60 crosses the center of town on the way to Lake Murray (built in the late 1920's). The Old Irmo Road (now closed) came from Nursery Road by the west side of the former Looney property through to just north of Union Methodist Church.

Harold Looney, Daddy's oldest brother, served as one of Irmos' early mayors. He went on to Lexington, S.C. to start the Chevrolet Dealership (H.L. Chevrolet Co.).

Later one of the Mayors was a Lorick. At another time Mr. James A Leitner, the store owner, served as mayor. I do not know the order of their service.

Later Mother's Brother, Mark Carlisle Nunamaker was mayor. During the building of Highway I-26, He tried to get the cloverleaf interchange at the Irmo exit at Hwy. 60 in the late 1950's. But his efforts failed, because of county politics.

Over 40 years later, the Interchange was finally built at
Obscene Costs to Taxpayers. That Irmo Exit is now at Lake
Murray Blvd.-- (Mr. Donald F. Looney suggested the name be
changed from Newberry Ave. in the 1990's) still is S.C.
Hwy. 60 from U.S. Hwys. 76 & 176 routes to Columbia, S.C.
The property adjacent to the above highways on the Irmo
side of the intersection (south side) was owned by Mr.
Roland Meetze. In the 1950's, he made and sold B.B.Q. Pork
there from his hogs. On this property, it was told that
there was an open top water well. (All early wells were open
because they were dug by hand.) And since the Civil War
Every time this well was cleaned out, they found coins of
money for decades. The story goes that when news of General
Shermans' March to Columbia reached the residents, they
lowered their money down the well to hide it from the Yankees.
On the way down, the money pouch was cut open by a sharp
rock, and the money spilled to the bottom of the well.
Now you have the rest of the story.
Northwest of S.C. Hwy. 60 in the intersection with U.S. 76
was Mr. Clyde Swygards Store-residence, and Auto Repair shop.
He also kept his Airplane parked by the Shop (a small Plane
like a PiperCub- maybe). The Plane was on a concrete runway
that could have been part of the old U.S. Hwy. 76 before it
was moved to the present location.
Now some years have gone by, and I have turned 73- thanks to
The Good Lord.

In the 1960's & 1970's, My Father, Johnnie W. Looney, Sr., Served Irmo in many different ways-- such as: Mayor, Councilman, Policeman, Water System Manager, Maintenance man, and Meter-reader.

He also served as Magistrate for the Irmo-Chapin Districts. Dad also owned and ran a repair shop at our home in the early 1950's. And He was a Choremaster (one wheel garden tractor) and Amphicat (6 wheel amphibian boat) Dealer.

Dad was Mayor when he had the first Irmo Town Hall built. The building is a Key shop today. The old building was a two cell wood jailhouse just north of old Post Office on St. Andrews Road(about 150 feet north of Fork Ave.).

In 2007 our Home place on Lake Murray Blvd., next to Walgreens Drug store, was sold for us by Judy Moore Looney. It was around the 1920's during the building of the Lake Murray Dam that S.C. Hwy. 60 was built to connect U.S. Hwy. 76 to the Dam and Lexington, S.C. (This earth dam at the time was the largest earth dam in the world). Highway 60 was going to go through Grandfather Olin Nunamaker's farm for most of a mile. He was unhappy about it splitting his property, eventhough the Highway Department paid him \$100 dollars for the right-of-way.

My Mother's four Brothers, Grady, Frank Perry, Mark Carlisle, and David, with guns, tried to stop them from coming through, but the Law won.

My Mother, Sarah Nunamaker, was raised by her older sisters, Thelma (Derrick), and Sybil Nunamaker; because her Mother died when she was 3 years old. Then her Father died when she was 16 years old.

Mom and Aunt Sybil inherited the 3 acres across from Mt. Olive Lutheran Church. Their Brothers and Uncle Curtis Derrick helped build their house and garage. After Mom and Dad were married, the births of myself and sister Beth followed. About the time brother Charles was born, Dad built the Barn. By the time, Donald, Suzie, and Dennis were born, Dad decided to buy Aunt Sybil's half interest in the property. That was about the same time Aunt Sybil bought the Irmo Post Office and Gin properties to build on. While all this was going on, Mother opened her Beauty Shop at our home (about 1950).

After Charles started Teaching, he married Helen Brabham (a Beauty Shop owner). They built their home next door to Mom and Dad, where Helen has a Beauty Shop to this day. When Mom retired, a lot of her customers went to Helen's Shop for hair service.

Brother Charles is serving in what was Dad's position, as Chairman/Manager of the Union Methodist Church Cemetery.

Brother Donald owns and runs JAYDERLOON Co. (The Greenhouse People) Manufacturing and Supply.

The House that was My Mother's family Home is on Nursery Road a quarter mile on the right from Lake Murray Blvd. It overlooked the family farm. Grandfather Olin Nunamaker was known to be the first rural Mail Carrier out of Irmo. He delivered the Mail in his horse drawn buggy to the Dutch Fork and Broad River areas.

Mr. Benny G. Bouknight (General Merchandise), Mr. Tolan R. Derrick (Grocery), and Mr. Sid W. Dula (Furniture and Appliances), also owned and ran stores in Irmo in the 1950's, and some years before.

Mr. Benny's Son, Wayne, worked at the Dam as a kid. (He lived, when a grown man, in a brick home across the street from Irmo School.) He said his job (with a bunch of other boys) was to carry water to the top of the Dam in a bucket to the workers. And the first day on the job (for all the boys) you did not get up the hill with any water, because when you were carrying your water up the hill another boy would throw dirt in your bucket of water. Then he had to fight him. He said it took all day to fight every waterboy; therefore, the next day they did not bother him.

The railroad was built out to the Lake Murray Dam site to bring equipment and supplies to construct the Dam and Powerhouse Electrical Plant. When the projects were finished the railroad (a spur off the C.N.&L.) was discontinued and the tracks were torn up. This RR. route through the hills was an overgrown valley in the 1940's and 50's. This spur

was rebuilt in about the 1960's on basically the same route as the old tracks to supply coal to fuel the new Steam Electric Generating Plants.

In the early 1940's during World War 11, an island in Lake Murray (beyond the ones that can be seen in the West from the Dam) was used by the Military Pilots to practice Bombing. The evidence is still there today. The bombs would shake the windows in our house, which was about 15 miles from the explosions.

One of the large Bombers crashed in the Lake during one of the practice missions. The plane was raised from the lake in the late 2000's to be restored for a Museum.

In the 1940's, a heavy rainstorm in the Saluda River basin above the Dam caused the Lake to rise faster than it could be released by all Gates and Turbines open wide. Therefore to avoid the Dam having water run over the top and/or the Dam bursting; Dynamite was set on the Irmo end of the Dam to gradually reduce the pressure on the Dam away from the powerhouse. But thankfully the water stopped rising, and the Dam was saved from being blown up.

After this close call, S.C.E.&G. raised the Dam in steps, one lane of the road; then the other side of the road across the Dam. They also added two wider Gates to the spillway. To widen the spillway, they had to blast through the Granite Rocks, which shook the windows of our house- almost six miles away.

To keep traffic flowing across the Dam to Lexington, a temporary causeway was built across the spillway channel below the Gates. Traffic was allowed to cross the Dam during construction at certain times.

By the way, there was a bridge across the Saluda River below the Dam, before the Dam was built. That was when Bush River Road to S.C. Hwy. 6 crossed the Saluda River to get to Lexington, S.C.

The Walter Looney roots are Scotch-Irish. They Settled in the Tennessee area, but early on his large family had to be split up for their survival; over the Carolinas and over to Alabama with relatives. Grandfather Looney lost track of his siblings. And in my Dad's later years, he and some of his siblings made contact with some long lost cousins, and had a reunion in Tennessee.

My Grandparents, Walter and MamieLooney had 12 children. He worked mostly in Textile Mills. And the family rented tenant houses on farms where the children worked. My Dad and his younger brother, Clyde took turns going to School and working everyother day. (This way one of them was in School everyday.) At that time, School was through the ninth grade. The School that Mom and Dad finished was next to the Union Methodist Church Cemetary. The School building was being used as an Armature Rewinding Plant when it burned in the 1950's.

The Looney family also lived on farms in the Broad River (Kinnerly Road) area. These Farms were owned by Grandmother Looney's Family. They were the Bouknights. She had eleven Siblings. Her Dad (my Great Grandfather) was killed by a Black Man. I do not know the details.

Dad once showed me a long unpainted wood house at the south edge of Irmo- off the west side of St. Andrews Road- on the side of the Jessie Folk property at the time. This is now Murraywood. (When Mr. Jessie Folk still farmed the land in the 1940's, we picked cotton for him at a penny per pound.) Dad said his family used to live in that house. In the 1940's, Grandfather and Grandmother Looney moved from Belton to Irmo, and rented the Old Methodist Church Parsonage. They were living there when Grandfather decided, he wanted to plow a horse again. He went to one of Uncle Harold's (his oldest son) farms, and started plowing a Walk Behind Plow. Someone happened to come by, and noticed the horse wandering around the field. Grandfather was found Dead in the field.

Later Grandmother Looney and her daughter, my Aunt Clara, rented a small house east of the railroad a block from Hwy. 60 and Tolan Derrick's Grocery Store. Benny Bouknight's Store was a block south on the same street. This was the late 1940's and early 1950's. Grandmother had her wood burning cook stove in the kitchen by Aunt Clara's modern electric cook stove. Grandmother did not believe in cooking on Sunday; therefore, she would cook on Saturday as if her

Children would eat with her on Sunday. But with no phones, she almost never knew. Sometimes some showed up and sometimes not anyone.

For years Grandmother would make her own Lye Soap, by building a fire under a big iron wash pot in the yard. All the time showing what a hard working Godly Woman she was. She spent hours reading and studying the Bible. And thankfully spending any quality time with her, she would always use the opportunity to Witness to you about the Saving Grace of Accepting Jesus Christ as Your Personal Savior. A visit with Grandmother was always a spiritually uplifting experience- regardless of your mood coming in.

A sub-note of interest on Uncle Carlisle Nunamaker. He joined the Navy to get out of the rocky cotton fields. During his 31 year Navy Career, he was all over the Pacific Ocean. By December 7, 1941, he was stationed in Honolulu, Hawaii.

Uncle Carlisle would never talk about the attack on Pearl Harbor to me, but he told my Sister, Suzie Newell that he had been ashore on liberty. He was on his way back to his ship, when the attack started; and he took temporary cover in a stack of lumber.

That's my story, and I'm stickin to it. If you think you remember somethings differently, that's your problem.

Thanks and God Bless You,

Johnnie W. Looney, Jr.

October 2011