

Isaiah Perkins in Dollar's Embrace, A Patchwork Quilt of Grist and Grace

Picking up our story from the first installment and the elopement gone wrong, I imagine you recognized that Isaiah's perspective of the commotion at the creek is what lived on in family lore, and there's more to it than what you've heard thus far.

Isaiah had an enterprising nature, was thrifty, and had learned he was not cut out to be a farmer. Once he'd saved up enough money, he built a grist mill on Weogufka Creek roughly halfway between Horse Stomp and Dollar. The mill site, even today, can be spotted if you look for where the water flow was once diverted on the inside of a bend in the creek. Our family always called it the Mill Shoals. It's on the lower part of Blaylock Bend, about a quarter mile upstream from Goat's Bluff where the creek has narrowed significantly. This is the only easy-to-find evidence left of the 19th century farming communities. Folks had homes at Horse Stomp back then; it's labeled on maps as a campground nowadays but access to it by road has been restricted. It's upstream and north of the underwater bridge.

The grist mill was a prosperous business for Isaiah, but it did have one challenge. During dry summer spells the water level could drop too low to run the mill. Isaiah had a remedy for that. Steam. He built a second grist mill on the creek at Dollar which was powered by steam. Running both mills served the locals well, as it did Isaiah. Now in his early twenties, he was an integral part of the strong, wide-spread community, and viewed as a reliable, responsible man.

We don't know where Isaiah lived during this time or how long he stayed at Joel and Sallie's after his creek side parting of the ways with Old Man Hardy. What we do know is Isaiah travelled between his two mills regularly and the road took him past the Hardy place. As he was passing by one day Isaiah's attention was drawn to a young lady out sweeping the Hardy's front yard. He described her as the prettiest little thing he had ever seen. She made a habit of working in the yard when it was time for Isaiah to pass, and he made a habit of passing the time of day with her whenever he got the chance. Along about four years after his failed attempt to run off with Mary Susan, who had long since married Braxton Bowden and moved to Chilton County, Isaiah was in a budding romance with... (Did ya catch on yet? Who d'ya reckon this pretty little thing is?) ... none other than Martha Taylor, the youngest Hardy sister. And yes, it was she who tattled on Isaiah and her big sister a few years earlier.

In a short while, Martha Taylor and Isaiah were very much in love. Within a year they wanted to get married. Having become an accomplished, confident man, this time Isaiah had no trouble asking for Old Man Hardy's consent for his daughter's hand in marriage. Martha Taylor was the marriageable age of sixteen, and her daddy had no trouble blessing her union with one of the most successful men in the county. Well, maybe just a little trouble. Of course, Richard Hardy, being the man he was, would have nothing but a proper church wedding for his daughter! For that to happen he had to get Isaiah reinstated in the church. And being who he still was in the community, Old Man Hardy made it happen. So, Russell Isaiah Perkins and Martha Taylor Hardy were married on a Thursday; August 7, 1890.



Isaiah called those next years the happiest of his life. They made their home on what the family always referred to as The Ingram Place, but none of us still living know the background on that name. Census records do show two Ingram family households in the area. Even though it was on the far side of Dollar from his upper Weogufka mill and added distance for Isaiah's travels, it was a lovely property and closer to the church. They built a home, dug a well, and made a good life for themselves there. This is where on January 5, 1892, their first child, Fred Daniel, was born. A baby girl, Mattie Belle, came later when Fred was five years old. Their homestead was on the south side of Hatchet Creek, about halfway from what is today the mouth of Hatchet on the river and the entrance to Pennamotley Creek. Any remains would have been obscured when the house was built that stands there today.

This is when hardship hit the young Perkins family, and it was all too common in those days. Fred caught the measles, and though he survived the disease, his mama and baby sister did not. Mattie Belle died at thirteen days old on March 16, 1897. Martha Taylor succumbed four days later; she was twenty-three. They are buried side by side at Dollar Cemetery on Hatchet Creek, a place where among the 19th century graves are many of infants and children. Sallie and Joel Wamick took in young Fred and reared him along with their own.

We see another example of what community was like around Dollar and how impactful it was on Isaiah's life: the Mehearg's took him in when he was ill as a boy, Sallie and Joel gave him sanctuary as a nineteen year old community member without a job, mind you, he wasn't family at that time, and here Sallie is mothering her nephew regardless of her own sorrow when her brother-in-law found himself in profound grief. It was a troubling, dark time for both little Fred and Isaiah, of course, but they had the love and support of the community, and they got through it.

Another aspect of the love and support of the community had an interesting look, and it's an insightful point in our family history. It was a traveling minister who had a hand in what brought relief to Isaiah and his boy. More accurately said, God's hand demonstrated through a circuit rider. In just ten months Isaiah married again. By today's standards one might say that's way too soon, but life was different then.

A little church like the one at Dollar wouldn't have its own preacher. Regional church authorities along with the locals would work within a circuit they established based on geographical proximity. Itinerant, traveling ministers would ride the circuit serving various churches on a rotating schedule. Moving among communities on horseback or sometimes by carriage or wagon if they were so fortunate, clergy would stay with various members of the community in each location and provide the congregations with church services, spiritual guidance, and pastoral care.

One of their circuit riders had a poignant conversation with Isaiah after Martha Taylor's death. It went something like this. --- Your little boy needs a mama. You need a wife. As it happens, I know a good woman over around Lewis who needs a husband. She's from a good family, has no children, is caring and compassionate, and she's well-regarded by everybody that knows'er. This could be just the thing to help you and Fred turn a corner, rebuild a comfortable life and home. Miss Alice would be a fine

addition to this community, too. Now you think on it a bit. If you're willin', I'd be happy to ride over there with you and make the introduction.

The way my Aunt Martha told it, one day the preacher took Isaiah to Miss Alice Vance, she agreed to the proposal, the wedding took place, and all three of them went back to Dollar in the same day. Coosa County marriage records document the union on January 18, 1898, officiated by J. D. Hughes. At the risk of being redundant, I'll say it again, things were different back then.

In case you're wondering, Isaiah was grandfather to Aunt Martha and my father, Fred Daniel, Jr., and then of course, that makes Isaiah and Martha Taylor my great grandparents. Miss Alice, which is what little Fred called his stepmother for the rest of his life, was by all accounts a wonderful wife, mother, and grandmother. She and Fred soon loved each other. The marriage was also loving and abundant in many ways. Isaiah and Alice went on to have a large family. They built a house right at the heart of the Dollar community where they lived, but also housed and operated a general store and post office in addition to running the grist mills and a bit of subsistence farming. It was not far off the creek upstream of Fixico Branch, maybe halfway to Joel and Sallie's place. It had easier access to both mills and the church, but perhaps most importantly, it kept them engaged with folks and eased the pain of Fred's and Isaiah's loss.



This picture of Isaiah and Alice Perkins' family was likely taken in late 1906. Their fifth daughter, Cainie, was born in October of that year and is the infant in Isaiah's arms. Also pictured, left to right, are Mae, Hattie, Maggie, Fred (only surviving child of Isaiah with Martha Taylor Hardy - became Fred, Sr. many

years later when my father was born), and Miss Alice with Jessie in front. (Wish I could tell ya the name of the dog.) They had two boys in the following years, Ed and Jim.

The first time I saw this picture I was told excitedly, "That's the house at Chimney Point! That's the chimney!" You see, there's a place downstream, around the bend from our current-day cabin on Weogufka that the family has called Chimney Point for all my life and some thirty years before. What's in this picture was submerged as the water backed up behind Mitchell Dam. In preparation for the water rising the house was torn down and the chimney knocked over. After the lake filled there were times, if you were in a boat at just the right place, you could see what was left of the chimney through the water. I wanted to see it, but never did. I remember asking Daddy what it looked like. I imagined an upright chimney that I needed to avoid hitting with the boat. He told me it's just a pile of rocks covered in sludge. I can't remember that I ever went looking, and I've always kept the boat well away from the point when passing by. I laugh when I catch myself looking at the chimney in the picture more than anything else.

I remember a time at the lake when Aunt Martha was talking about Isaiah with love but also disapproval in her voice. She wasn't one to hide her feelings. Isaiah would do things like belch out loud during a meal with no attempt to be polite, and he'd argue with those who might correct him saying it was a complement to the cook. As a youngster, my son heard this about his namesake and decided it to be an innate family trait he would carry forward. Well, to be fair I should say that practice happens more often around family than otherwise. I have, however, heard from one or two of his closer female friends who have had the honor of the experience. But I digress. Aunt Martha was particularly indignant about a comment Isaiah would make from time to time about marriage. He was of the mind that that first marriages were for love, and second marriages were for convenience, and said as much too often. It embarrassed the family. Miss Alice, on the other hand, didn't complain or seem to doubt her husband's love even when he talked about Martha Taylor with dancing eyes and deep affection. Everyone understood and accepted Isaiah never got over losing Martha Taylor and appreciated that he had moved on to have a wonderful, long life. So many of us wouldn't be here if he hadn't.

That's about it for the moment, but there is more to come. In the next episode, you'll hear About the Perkins family leaving Coosa County before Lake Mitchell water levels obscured the lowlands, and how they came back - keeping Dollar alive for generations to follow.