

THE 83RD COWARD FAMILY REUNION

Jane & Dot's Cabin

Norton, N. C.

June 16, 1974

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It is likely that the first Coward to come to Western North Carolina was JAMES COWARD. According to the records of the Office of the Secretary of State in Raleigh, N.C., JAMES COWARD received a grant of 100 acres "on both sides of Green River" in Rutherford Co., N. C., on the 9th day of August 1787. Ref.: Book 65, Page 321, File No. 305.

This JAMES COWARD was the father of several children, one being JONATHAN COWARD. Jonathan was the father of NATHAN COWARD.

The first Coward Family Reunion was held June 12, 1892. The family of NATHAN COWARD had gathered on this date to celebrate his birthday. The tradition of having an annual family reunion on or near his birthday has continued each and every year from that date to the present time.

The following article was written in 1898 by Clara Coward Smith, daughter of Nathan Coward, on the occasion of the seventh annual family reunion:

"On the 12th day of June, 1892, we met at our Father's house to celebrate his seventy-fourth birthday anniversary. There and then we agreed to meet every year during his life, rotating from one home to another beginning at my house, I being the eldest. This we have followed up, going on down from one home to another until to-day we meet with our youngest brother at his home -- once our dear old home.

"Let us look back and contemplate how much we have to be thankful for.

"First, let us thank God that he has spared our dear Father to meet with each of us at our own homes. Yes, we are a favored family to have our Father among us all these years; and he, too, has been more than ordinarily favored with long life -- to-day he becomes an octogenarian. Few indeed can say this.

"Then let us thank God that we are here on the very spot where we were born, where we can look back on our childhood days. Ah, well do we all remember the happy days we have spent here together. To-day our minds go back and each one of our dear brothers and sisters seem to come up as in the days that we were light-hearted children, when our sorrows were momentary and our joys abundant.

"But the deepest memories that cling to us are those of our dear sainted Mother. I do believe if we did not have the very best Mother that ever lived there never has been or ever will be another as self-sacrificing and unselfish as she was. Now, we can only remember her in the past. You who were favored with being with her in her last hours remember that when told by our Father she was nearing the end of this life, that she said, 'I have always prayed for dying

grace and now I have it.' Blessed be God for such a Mother as we had, and blessed be His name that we have the assurance that she is now happy; that she is where suffering and sorrow cannot reach her!

"One of our Mother's constant prayers while she lived was that we be an undivided family in eternity. God grant that it may be so! -- help us to realize that we have no Mother to pray for us now. Let each of us ask ourselves the question, Are we ready if the last summons should come? If we are not, let us resolve now to get ready before the sun shall set again to meet our Mother.

"I believe there has been a death among us for each year since we have been having these reunions. First after meeting at our Father's house was Brother Bob's little Tommie. We all remember how sweet and bright this little darling was. Yes, he was too pure for this earth, so God transplanted him in His own garden.

"In 1893, we met at my house. I wondered on that day who would be next. I did not have long to wait. In less than two months the dread messenger came to my own door and carried one of my best and most precious children away. Beulah was so pure and so dear to us that we did not feel like we could give her up, yet how much easier to give such a one up than if it were otherwise.

"In 1894, we met at Brother Dave's.

"In 1895, we assembled at Sister Mary's. This time there was no death to chronicle.

"In 1896, we met at Brother Oscar's home. This time it was Sister Sallie's little Ben -- another one too pure for earth. But God had a little spot especially for Ben.

"In 1897, we gathered at Sister Sallie's. This time we are forced to look back on a greater loss. What! a greater loss than a darling child? Yea, verily. That of a wife and mother. It was Sister Emma, Brother Oscar's wife. We can do our best to sympathize with our dear Brother, yet we cannot in reality feel his loss as it is. None can except those who have had just such a trial. Neither do we know what it is to do without a Mother in childhood. We can look at the "shorn lambs" then look back to the time when our Mother kissed our sorrows away; when her tenderness and sympathy was all the world to us. May God help us to supply the tenderness and sympathy that those young hearts yearn for.

"Now, on the 12th of June, 1898, here I look back just a little over five weeks. Hush! What is it! The death angel has been at my house again and carried away another one of my choicest flowers. This is so hard to bear, but, using little Blanche's dying words, 'God knows best.'

"Then, too, less than two year's ago another one dear to more than one family of us -- Mother Smith. This Grandmother to our children was removed from us. Her death leaves a vacancy that no other one can fill. A dear, good Grandmother like she was is a benediction to any family.

"Now, I have no disposition to add one pang to a heart or mar the pleasure of anyone present, but desire with my whole heart that this will be a day long to be remembered on account of its enjoyment to all present.

"But let it be our great aim and may we all strive to be present -- our Father and each and every one of his children and his present wife -- when the roll is called up there, and not only this but may take every one of our children with us. God help us to realize the responsibility of fathers and mothers.

"May God spare our Father and each one of us for years to come."

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Woodie Hooper says she remembers well these early reunions. At that time, the family at whose home the reunion was to be held was responsible for preparing all the food for the occasion. Woodie says her mother, Mary Coward Zachary - in order to be sure to have enough - would prepare one pie, one cake, one chicken, and one large ham for each family planning to attend. Large bowls of vegetables and fruit, plus hot bread were served. Folks were seated at the table. Approximately 85 people would be served, in shifts. This required the gathering together of a lot of plates, etc., as there were no paper plates at that time. As you can imagine, it took several days to prepare for the reunion.

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The following was written about 1944, possibly by Nannie Smith McGuire, the daughter of Clara Coward Smith.

"James Coward, with three brothers, came from England and settled at Culpepper, Virginia. Then James Coward moved to Rutherford, North Carolina, and while there married a woman by the name of Weaver. They were the parents of five children whose names were, as follows: -

"Jonathan, Stephen, Elihu, Peter, and one son, whose name is unknown.

"Jonathan Coward and Peter Coward moved from Rutherford to Greenville, South Carolina, and both settled there for awhile. They lived on the Colonois River in what is now known as Pickens County.

"While there, Jonathan Coward, who was our Great-Grandfather, married Martha Hudson, and from there moved to the French Broad River, but later moved to Caney Fork Creek where he spent the remainder of his life. He was a Cooper by trade.



"To Jonathan Coward and Martha Hudson Coward were born the following children:-

"James, Betsey, Nancy, Jonathan, Jennie, Elihu, Polly, Hutson, Benjamin, Mattie, and NATHAN, the youngest whose birthday we are celebrating to-day, as he was our Grandfather and Father.

"NATHAN COWARD built his first home (a one-room log cabin) one year before he was married to Jane Rogers. Later the house was added to, making a long structure, with a porch in front. Nathan Coward's home was one mile from where his Father lived. He reared his first family in this house, and lived in THREE COUNTIES, and never moved. When he built the house it was Buncombe County, later Haywood, and then Jackson.

"To Nathan Coward and Jane Rogers Coward were born ten children, whose names were as follows:-

"Emeline, who died while yet a child; Clara, who married Lewis J. Smith; Talvin, who married Rebecca Bryson; David, who married Lou Norton; Samantha, who married George Tumlin, and who died without children; Mary who married Kit Zachary; Oscar, who married Emma Long the first time. After Emma Long Coward's death, Oscar married Elinora Zachary; John, who died while still a young man; Sallie, who married Will Norton; and Robert, who married Lena Allen.

"All of the children of Nathan Coward and Jane Rogers Coward are now dead, but many of us who are still alive can remember the noble qualities possessed by the children of these parents.

"Uncle Robert, died\* shortly before the reunion on the 12th of last June, so most of us here to-day remember the strong personality and lovable person he was, as he rarely ever missed a reunion if possible for him to attend. In fact, he often went to a great deal of trouble and expense to make the trip back to Western North Carolina to be with us on this day, and his presence was always a benediction.

"Most all of us can remember, with pride, reverence, and love the Mothers, Fathers, Uncles and Aunts belonging to this family. No wonder we are justly proud of our heritage.

"In 1886, Nathan Coward married Sophia Hedden and moved to Webster, which was then the County site of Jackson County, where he reared his second family. The names of these children are as follows:-

"Homer, Frances, Frank, and Janie. All of these children are still living. Frances married Mr. Raymond Glenn of this County, and Homer married\*\* \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_. Janie and Frank have not yet married. Homer has \_\_\_\_\_ children.\*\*\*

"As we are proud of the first family of Nathan Coward, we are also equally as proud of the noble qualities portrayed

by the children of the second family.

"Sophia Hedden Coward was a woman possessed with rare qualities; firm in her conviction of right and wrong, always sympathetic, generous and lovable, she was a great favorite with all who knew her. With her happy disposition she made the last days of Nathan Coward very happy, although she was considerably younger than he."

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As we gather today - June 16, 1974 - at this lovely cabin of the youngest child of Nathan and Sophia Coward, for this the 83rd Coward FAMILY REUNION, let us keep in mind our heritage and the spirit of love that has been passed down from generation to generation in this good family. Let us never get too busy to take the time to show that we care one for another.

Jo Ann Smith  
(Mrs. H. A. Smith)  
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- \* Uncle Bob Coward died 4 May 1943.
- \*\* Homer Coward married Jean Appleby Smith.
- \*\*\* They had two children, I believe.