

A special thanks to Grace, Willie's daughter, for sharing this excellent accounting of what life was really like on the farm. I hope it will help us to better appreciate the Segler Family, the hardships of that time and the amenities we enjoy today.

My Childhood Memories Growing Up On The Segler Farm

By Grace Blackman Griffin

I was about one year old when we moved to the farm. I don't remember moving there, but as I grew older I began to see what a beautiful place it was. When Granddad Mack Segler died, Grandmother Polly Segler moved to Dothan, Alabama. She wanted my Dad to move into the house and take care of the farm. I think it was around 1924 when we moved there.

We children worked the farm. My father worked at other jobs so he was gone during the day. We had to get up early every morning and go to the field to work. We worked until time to eat dinner. Mama would ring a big dinner bell we had in the back yard. When she got dinner cooked, she rang the bell so we knew to go to the house to eat. We had cotton to hoe; then had it to pick – a job I hated. We grew corn and peanuts, and when the peanuts were harvested they were put on stacks to dry. In the fall when the crops were harvested, we had to get ready for school. Mama would take us to town to buy school clothes. That was a big day for us!

We went to a one-room school with one teacher. The school was built on the Segler property. It was known as the Segler school. All the kids in the neighborhood went to that school. Some of them had a long way to walk. We had a short distance to walk. We went home for lunch. The other kids had to bring their lunch to school. During the winter, it would be so cold we would walk through the woods because it seemed warmer that way. We had a new teacher each year at the Segler school. Most of the teachers boarded at a nearby home and walked to the school. One exception was my 1st grade teacher, Mr. Childree; he had a Model-T car and could drive to and from his home. During my 4th grade year, our teacher, Mrs. Hudson, boarded at our house. There was a bed in the front room and that is where she stayed. She was the last teacher at the Segler school. The next year we were transferred to the Arton school. Christmas was a very exciting time at the Segler school. We trimmed a tree with things we made. We didn't have much to decorate with, but we had fun. We drew names and gave the one we picked a gift. The teacher let us give out the gifts. No one had much money back then so the gifts were simple but they were appreciated so much. The girls might get a handkerchief or a powder puff and the boys might get tops or marbles or a sling shot. After the gifts were given out it was time to go home for a week or two. I think we had about two weeks off for Christmas. We were so happy. We didn't have work to do in the fields, either.

Christmas was very exciting at home. We went into the woods to find a Christmas tree and brought it home. We all decorated it with red and green crepe paper, cut in long strips and wrapped around the tree. We put a big red bow on the front door. We put branches of holly and mistletoe in the windows and on the mantle over the fireplace. We thought we had the prettiest house in the neighborhood! Mom would spend days in the kitchen cooking on a wood burning stove for Christmas. We always had a big smoked ham from the smoke house for dinner. One thing we had to look forward to on Christmas Eve was Nathe's visit. He would come early Christmas Eve. He would come up the road to the house saying "Christmas Eve gift, Christmas Eve gift". Mama would always fix him a box of food she had cooked and Daddy would always give him a little money. He was so proud and he would leave. We knew he would be back to eat Christmas dinner with us. One Christmas he made a big cotton basket and gave it to us for a Christmas gift. We used that basket for a long time.

We children loved Nathe. We went to his house a lot and sat around the fireplace and listened to him talk. He always had stories to tell. We loved to hear him play his fiddle. We would sit and listen to him play until it got late and we would go home. Mama would send us to check on him if he didn't come every day to visit. If he was sick, Mama would fix him food and we would take it to him. We loved to take food because that meant we could stay a while and listen to him play the fiddle. Sometimes, if he was able, he would help us in the field. By that time he was getting real old. We loved Nathe; he was part of the family.

Daddy came home one day with a pony for us. We were so happy. We kept him for a long time. His name was Bill. In the afternoon, when we got out of school, Bill would meet us at the fence. One day we came home and Bill was not there. We asked Mama where Bill was. My father had gotten rid of him because he was beginning to get old and mean. They were afraid he would hurt us. Daddy gave him to another family. We also had an oxcart. The ox was a big gray ox with big horns. He was very gentle, so he was not a danger to us. We had a lot of fun with the ox and cart.

We played marbles, jumped rope, and spent a lot of time in the woods climbing trees and wading in streams of water. We had a swimming pool that we dug out near a spring so it had fresh water in it. We spent a lot of time in it. Another thing we did for fun was to make a fire ball out of twine. We wrapped twine into a ball until it got as big as we wanted it. Then we soaked it in kerosene for a day or two. At night we would set the ball on fire and throw it from one end of a cleared field to the other end. Some of the neighbor kids would come and play with us at night. The fireball was pretty, sailing through the night sky.

Every Sunday afternoon we had a lot of people come to visit. All the kids would play outside and the older people would sit on the front porch and talk. There was one thing we all liked to do and that was "play church". We had a make-believe piano. One girl I remember always wanted to be the one to play the "piano" and she usually got to do it. The piano was a big wash tub turned upside down with a bucket to sit on. The "pianist" would hit the bottom of the tub and make a sound. We would all stand around and sing. We had a lot of fun with that wash tub. I can't imagine kids doing that today, but that was during the Depression and times were hard. Children back then could always find fun things to do. I think one of the songs we sang was "Jesus Loves Me" and probably some we made up. It didn't take much to entertain us. I think about that tub sometimes and I have a big laugh.

There were two cotton houses on the farm. When the cotton was picked it was put in the 2 houses. Some days while we were picking cotton, a rain cloud would come up and we would run to a cotton house and stay until the rain was over. Sometimes there would be a beautiful rainbow across the sky and we knew the rain was over for awhile. The cotton would be too wet to pick for that day and we were so happy.

We grew all of our vegetables so we had to do a lot of canning to have food for winter. Every morning in the summer, we would go the fields to pick vegetables and then haul them to the house in our oxcart. We grew a lot of cabbage so one day was set aside to make kraut. Grandmother Polly Segler would come and spend summer with us and help make kraut. If you have never eaten any homemade kraut, you have missed a treat.

One day in winter, when the weather was real cold, was hog-killing day. Some of the neighbors would come and help. It was an all-day job. Everyone started early in the morning, and it lasted until late afternoon. When everyone left to go home they were given some of the meat to take home with them. We had a smoke house, so Mama and Daddy would hang hams, sausage and slabs of bacon over a hickory fire to smoke the meat. It would take about a month to smoke but was so delicious. I always liked to go into the smoke house; it smelled so good.

Monday was wash day. All the dirty clothes, sheets and towels were carried to the spring behind the house and washed in a wash tub. A big iron pot was filled with water and a fire built under it. The water was brought to a boil. After the clothes were washed in soap and cold spring water, they were put in the iron pot and boiled until Mama thought they were clean enough to be rinsed in the wash tub and hung on the line to dry. Friday was cleaning day. Floors were mopped and yards swept. Sunday was church day. No work that day. We went to Sunday school and church. The preacher would come eat dinner with us some Sundays.

The old house is almost gone now. The barn and two cotton houses are gone. We had a lot of fun playing in the cotton houses and I miss seeing them. I have to wonder what stories the old house could tell; and if the land could talk, it would have a lot to say about those who left their footprints there so many years ago.

We were so excited Christmas Eve. We did not go to bed until Santa came and left our gifts on the front porch. We put out big boxes for him to put our gifts in. Girls got dolls and tea sets. The boys would get pocket knives, tops, firecrackers and marbles. We always got a lot of fruit, nuts and candy – a big box of stick candy. Daddy and Mama would give each of us a silver dollar. We got one of those each Christmas for five years. I have saved mine. I'm so proud I did. One of them is real old.

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