



Matthew Cornelius Wilson and Bessie Elizabeth Cooper on their wedding day in 1907

BESSIE ELIZABETH COOPER

May 3, 1891 - Sept. 23, 1970

Bessie Elizabeth Cooper was born May 3, 1891 in Harold, Santa Rosa County, Florida. She was the sixth child of James Fountain (Jim) Cooper and Lucyann Missouri Levins. Bessie was a beautiful petite woman with eyes of blue. She had six brothers and four sisters.

She married Matthew Cornelius Wilson in 1907. They had ten children. Pearlle Lorraine, Ira Lee, Allen Woodrow, Noma Lee, Inez Orneal, Susanna Frances (Sue), Mary Magdalene, Vivian, Elise and Matthew Cornelius Jr. (Shine).

Bessie spent her days caring for the children, house and garden. Matthew had many talents. He was the Blacksmith for the Porter Mill. He cut ties and floated them down the river to the mill in Milton. Matthew was the first barber in Holt. They also owned a Café in Holt. Bessie's daughter, Noma lee remembers that Pearlle and Ira would sneak away from Bessie and she would follow the trail of Sulfur to the Café. There she would find the children with their Dad. Evidently, Pearlle and Ira liked the taste of Sulfur.

February 20, 1942, Matthew died. This left Bessie with six children at home. She went to work as a Cook at the local school. Later that year her daughter Vivian was ironing, she put too much wood in the stove. The flames shot up and caught the roof on fire. Bessie and the six children were without a home. Bessie moved her family into one side of her daughter Ira's home.

James Fountain's home by the Railroad Tracks in Holt was on the Auction Block. Ira and Noma purchased the house. The lumber from the house was used to build Bessie a home on Southside Dr., which made Bessie very happy. Once again she had a home of her own. The basic structure of that home still stands.

Bessie was very religious; she was a member of the Assembly of God Church. Noma Lee states that, "When the church doors were open, Bessie was there." Bessie and other women from the church would each piece together a square and embroider their names on the square. The quilt made from these

squares would then be sold, and the profit would go to the church. She would also crochet pieces for the church to sell.

She loved growing flowers. She also enjoyed the trips she made with her son Matthew, his wife Barbara, Noma Lee and Ira Lee.

Bessie also loved Hogs-Head Cheese. She would attend the “Hog killing” as they called it, at Pearlie and Lonnie’s. She would take the parts needed to make the cheese. After making the cheese she would share it with her family and friends.

In 1967 Bessie became ill and could no longer stay alone. Her daughter Noma Lee left her home in Crestview to take care of her mother. After Bessie recovered from her illness, Noma remained with her till her death September 23, 1970. Bessie never remarried.

*Compiled By: Shirley Jean Parker, grandniece and great granddaughter of Bessie Elizabeth Cooper
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