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Loss of 4 Children in Pacolet Flood Has Failed to Break Spirit of Mrs. Massey

By SUSAN NAVES

Mrs. Mary Massey, 82, of Hadden Street, Duncan, possesses many rare gifts—a firm belief in God, an indomitable spirit, love for and belief in her fellow man.

This little old lady's spirit couldn't be broken by the swirling, muddy waters of Pacolet River when it went on a rampage June 6, 1903.

The angry torrent, brought on by a cloudburst at the head of Pacolet River, broke through 2 dams, swept through Clifton Mill Village, and snatched 4 of her children, 2 of them from their mother's arms, to their deaths.

Mrs. Massey, on that tragic June night, narrowly escaped death when a tree, in which she sought refuge with 5 of her children, was uprooted by pressure of timbers and other flood debris. Mrs. Massey was plunged into the muddy water with 2 of her children in her arms. She lost the children in the water. Only one of the 5 children, a 16-year-old daughter, was rescued. The other 4 were swept away while Mrs. Massey struggled for her own life.

The children, 3 girls and one boy, were 11, 9, 7 and 5 years old. The daughter was rescued from another tree to which she clung after the tree had been uprooted.

When we visited her, Mrs. Massey recalled vividly the story of that night when she and her children were roused from their home by the sudden flood. She said they climbed out an upstairs window into a tree nearby.

This tree was their refuge until it washed away from under them. "I went under the water with 2 of my babies in my arms, and when I came to the surface



MRS. MASSEY..... keeps busy, cheerful at 82.

again, they were gone," Mrs. Massey said.

"My 16-year-old daughter washed into another tree just below where we had been. She stayed in this tree several hours before she was rescued.

"The rescue was brought about by a preacher; I have forgotten his name now. He went to Cowpens and got 2 bales of cotton and 1,200 feet of rope. He tied this rope to a tree and some men held it while he rowed out on the cotton to where my daughter was and brought her back with him.

"When I came to the surface to find my children gone, I caught onto some timber that was floating by. The waves from the river beat my body and the timbers closer to the shore.

"Finally I got near enough to reach a limb on a tree near the bank. A Mr. Powell threw a rope to me and told me to catch to it. But I was sort of stunned and said 'No, I'm holding on now and am not going to turn loose,' but I did turn loose with one hand and grab the rope. When they got me out of the water, I was holding on to the rope and also to the limb. I had held on to the limb so tightly, the whole thing came up and they dragged it out with me. They had to pry this limb out of my hand before I turned it loose."

The flood, which struck suddenly swelling over the banks, claiming 66 lives and destroying 72 homes, had subsided into the regular banks of the river Sunday morning, the next day, Mrs. Massey recalled.

Mrs. Massey also recalled that Clifton Mill No. 2 and a part of Pacolet Mill were destroyed by the flood which resulted in thousands of dollars in property damages.

Just as vividly as she recalled the tragic events of the flood, Mrs. Massey remembers the kindness of her neighbors and friends. These friends and neighbors did not let her down, she declared. "My neighbors and friends have never let me down, and they won't," she stoutly affirmed.

Mrs. Massey has lived to see all of her 8 children except one, Mrs. R. A. Arrowood, of 486 Gentry Street, Beaumont, precede her to the grave. Despite the tragic events in her life, she is about the most cheerful little old lady it has been my privilege to meet.

She lost her husband 16 years ago and since that time has lived in Duncan where she now resides with part of her house rented out. She is a native of Morganton, N. C., and was Miss Mary Ernest before marriage.

Mrs. Massey is a staunch Christian and has never missed an opportunity to attend church.

She is a member of the Duncan Baptist Church, located within sight of her home. "I used to walk, but most of the time some of my neighbors come for me now," she said.

In addition to other qualities found in this slightly built lady, one finds a proud, independent spirit. "I have never been one to fall down on anyone," she declared.

In looking over the modest living room, I noticed a well worn Bible atop a small table model radio, snow white curtains, and absolute cleanliness about the entire place.

To support her assertion that she "did not fall down on anyone," Mrs. Massey proudly told us about her handiwork and displayed samples. She sews and makes quilts which she sells. "I bought materials, made quilts and sold them last summer," she said. "I can make 2 or 3 a week."

This remarkable woman can hear and see as well as anyone, and only resorts to eye glasses when she sews a long time.

She does her own housework, her own cooking, but declared: "It gets mighty lonesome sometimes living by myself. But I have my radio, and I sure do enjoy it". She stays up rather late, but arises by 7 o'clock each day when she is well, she said.

"If I get sick, I don't want for a thing. My neighbors and my church are so very good to me," she declared. "I am grateful to the Lord for allowing me to stay as strong as I am and for being so good to me."

Mrs. Massey is small, weighing about 100 pounds, has neat, almost white hair and was neatly dressed even though she was not expecting company when I went to her home. She proudly announced that she has 9 grandchildren and 8 great grandchildren.

Whatever Mrs. Massey's philosophy is for remaining cheerful, loving her fellow man and, as she says "looking to God" it's better than the Fountain of Youth. I have seen few people as happy and contented as she is.
