

Memories from the Great Niece of Alexander Black



Blacksburg holds memories for many people who have lived in the town throughout the years, long ago and more recent times too. This house, the Alexander Black house, is filled with remembrances of the past also. The house was built in 1897. Alex Black lived here with his wife, Lizzie Otey and their adopted daughter, Mary Louise (*pictured left*). Uncle Alex Black lived until 1935, but his wife Lizzie Otey Black died in 1926, eight years after the death of their daughter in 1918. Our grandmother, Lizzie Black

Apperson, whose husband, Dr, John S. Apperson had died in 1908, moved from their home in Marion, Virginia to live with her brother in this house. Blacksburg was Lizzie Black Apperson's childhood home. She told all of us about the time the Yankees came through the town. Many of my memories during the late 1920's and early 1930's revolve around the everyday living in this house. Even though my immediate family did not live here, we spent much time with our Great Uncle Alex, our Grandmother Lizzie and our Aunt Mary Apperson. Each time I have returned to the house, it has been a time of coming home to me.

One of my favorite places in the house was the stairway and the space behind it, a perfect place for a child to hide from everyone. The stained glass window on the stairway was a fascinating wonder. Another place of secrets and treasures was the attic. I was allowed to go there once in a while with Aunt Mary when she used her sewing machine. The feeling and the pleasing odor of the attic seem to linger on.

How well I remember the living room where Uncle Alex had his reading chair and Grandmother Lizzie sat at the desk writing. It was here several years later that my three sisters and I were baptized on a Sunday afternoon. Our Aunt Mary taught music and there was a beautiful Baby Grand piano in this room. The family gathered here in front of the warm fireplace to read the mail, letters from friends and family, a rather boring situation for a little girl. I learned quite early to be quiet during this time and during the long afternoon rides in the big car.

The dining room with its long table and good food was a magical place. Grandmother had only to press the button under the table with her foot and someone would come from the kitchen with more hot rolls and butter and rich cold milk that was brought in from the springhouse, located at the back



Young Nita Little

of the house. The milk was poured into beautiful silver mugs for drinking, Many times all the chairs around the table were occupied by family members, with Uncle Alex sitting at one end of the table and Grandmother at the other.

All during the years there were many people who came to the house at different times, family and friends. In later years, when Uncle Alex was not well, several nurses came to the house and took care of him. I remember so well Bessie Price and her daughter, Louise. They were there at the house most of the time and did so many things for all of us. All the children who were in and out of the house at various times loved Louise. She took good care of all of us, played with us and made our lives very happy. I remember, too, that Grandmother helped Louise with her schoolwork, especially spelling and arithmetic. When Uncle Alex's friends came to visit (namely Dean Williams, C.P. (Sally) Miles, and Uncle Jim Otey) they sat on the porch and discussed the issues of the day while enjoying Mint Juleps made and served by Louise. She used the mint that grew near the springhouse. When oatmeal (not my favorite cereal) was the order of the day for breakfast, Louise did a special favor for me; she helped me dispose of most of my oatmeal when no one was looking so I didn't have to eat it all.

The yard was a child's delight. With space to run and play and a stream in which to wade, find crayfish, rocks and mud for making mud pies. A beautiful willow tree grew by the stream. Walking and sitting on the stone wall, which ran the width of the yard and on along the front of the cow pasture were pastimes enjoyed by all of us and by other children and grown-ups as well. Often, on Sunday afternoons the VPI Cadets walked by and sat on the wall both in front of the house and on along the cow pasture. I have a vivid memory of selling a mud pie to a cadet (he had bright blue eyes) for a stick of chewing gum.



The elementary school was close by. Sometimes my sisters and I would go to Uncle Alex's house to wait for a ride home with our father, Kent Apperson, back to our farm in the country. This farm became Apperson Park.

Nita Black Apperson Little, October 2002