

“The Second Emigration”

from

The Last One Leaving Mayberry

by

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“Here they come! I can hear them coming now! Three year old Vera had been assigned the task of watching for Uncle Tobe and his family coming down the lane. It was an early morning in April of 1910 when Tobias Yeatts, his wife Stella, and their five children, Roy, Foy, May, Amy, and Evy, came riding the wagon down the lane from Kettle Hollow. As she listen to the sound of the approaching wagon, Vera strained her eyes for the first glimpse of the horses emerging from the morning mist.

“Here they come! They’re coming down the lane,” Vera ran into the kitchen where her mother, Edna, was cleaning up from breakfast.

Edna sighed and dried her hands on her apron. “Oh, Lordy, I was still hoping that Tobe and Stella would come to their senses.”

“They’re here Dump,” Edna called to her husband. Dump Yeatts had taken the day off from carrying the mail so he could say a proper goodbye to his brother and his family, who were bound for Montana.

“I heard.” Dump’s terse response reflected the sadness of his entire family on this foggy morning. This was the moment they had been dreading since that evening last winter, when Tobe and Stella had announced, out of the blue, that they were selling the farm and moving Out West.

Tobe Yeatts moving his young family to Montana simply did not make sense to his brother, Dump. Tobe had a secure job as the Mayberry mail carrier, and they owned about eighty acres of pretty good farm land and their own house. Tobe and Stella had built the sturdy little two-room house the first year they were married, and it had at least kept them

warm and dry for eleven years, but it was crowded now, with five children and another on the way. Dump and Edna had known for years that Tobe and Stella had been squirreling away every penny, but they just wrote it off as their frugality. Then, just last winter, they learned that the money was being saved toward the dream of owning a ranch Out West.

No question, there was limited opportunity in a mountain community such as Mayberry at the turn of the twentieth century. Many families living on the steep mountain farms around Mayberry, Virginia were



Tobe and Stella’s kids: Roy, Foy, May, Evy, and Amy. Shortly before the family left Virginia

now into their third or fourth generation, and all of the good farm land there had long been taken. The splitting up of family farms to be divided among the children of large families meant smaller and smaller acreages, generation upon generation. The availability of land was reaching its limit, and lots of folks in the East were moving west.

Two of Stella's older brothers had moved to north-eastern Montana several years earlier, and they wrote back glowing reports of the vast tracts of fertile farm land which could be bought from the Black Foot or the Assiniboine Indians for just a few dollars an acre. One of Edna Yeatts's cousins and his family had emigrated to Montana just two years before. Edna's older sister, Flora, married to another one of Stella's brothers, had moved to Colorado. Everyone who had moved Out West reported back to Maybeiry that they were far more prosperous there than they could have ever been, had they stayed back East.

Life in the Western Plains may have been rugged, but to these determined mountain people, trying to build a ranch in the untamed west was more appealing than to continue trying to wrest a living from a rocky hillside farm or, even less desirable, going to work in the stifling cotton mills of Danville, Virginia.

By the time Tobe and Stella revealed their intentions to emigrate, they had already planned their move in minute detail. But the reality that they were moving came like a bolt from the blue to Dump and Edna. Tobe and Stella were their nearest neighbors, and the two families were very close in their daily lives. For years, brothers Dump and Tobe had been helping each other with the farm work, borrowing horses, cutting wood, killing hogs, and building barns. Tobe wanted to sell everything to Dump. Though crushed by the thought of his brother leaving, Dump agreed to buy their place, and the price he paid Tobe was more than he could have gotten from anyone else.

Stella was Edna's closest friend, and for years they had depended on each other for support. Now the reality had dawned that they were going to be separated, perhaps forever. The two women helped each other daily, looking after each other's children as they shared routine tasks such as caring for their gardens and preparing and storing food for the harsh mountain winters. Just the year before, Dump and Edna's five-year-old daughter, Clarice, had suddenly become frightfully sick. Dump had ridden to get the doctor and Edna was at the child's side, tending to her when she realized that her daughter was dying. She scooped the small body up in her arms and ran



Tobe and Stella with Foy and Roy

screaming up the lane to Stella's house, pleading for someone to please save her child. Clarice passed away, but Stella's strong support had been indispensable to Edna's survival through her ordeal of awful grief. And now the two women were going to be separated by a distance of two thousand miles. In 1910, that seemed to Edna as though Stella and her family were moving to the dark side of the moon.

As the wagon pulled up beside the house, a forlorn and weeping family filed out through the door and down the steps to greet and say good bye to the travelers. One by one, Tobe's family climbed down from the wagon, and silently, except for the sobbing and an occasional "God bless you," everyone in the one family hugged everyone in the other. Then Tobe firmly announced that they had to get going, and one by one, they all climbed back into the wagon and they were on their way. As the horses pulled the wagon onto the Mayberry Road, Tobe called back over his shoulder, with a bit of bravado, "We'll write — let you know how we're doin'. You'll be comin' West yourselves in a few years, I'd bet." And with everyone weeping and waving, they disappeared into the mist from Mayberry Creek that still shrouded the road.

About five minutes up the road, almost to the Mayberry Store, Tobe and Stella heard a faint, breathless call, over clatter of the horses' hoofs and the creaking of the wagon.

"Wait! Please wait up." Tobe pulled back on the reins and called "whoa, whoa" to the horses, quickly bringing the wagon to a halt. Five year-old Lora came breathlessly running up beside the wagon and stretched up, handing a small rectangular object to Stella. It was a small, metal framed, tintype photograph of Edna, Dump, and the five children.

"Mama said to give you this, so you-all won't forget us." That was all that Lora said, as she turned and ran back down the road and into the mist. As Stella looked closely at the picture, her eyes filled with tears. Little Clarice was in that picture, and now she was



Lucien Reynolds, Foy, Ray, Roy, Amy, May Yeatts, Sallie Reynolds and other cousins in Montana, circa 1914

gone. Stella wondered out loud if she would ever see any of these dear people again, and if her own family would all survive their new adventure. She opened her carpet bag and slipped the picture inside, thankfully unaware that her youngest daughter, Evy, would also be gone in less than a year. Stella also knew that she was pregnant with a sixth child, but she had not yet told Tobe, for fear he might back out of their westward move.

Tobe and Stella had planned well for their move to Montana. All the large items they were taking had already been crated up and sent ahead. The farm and the house had been sold to Dump and Edna, and most of the furniture and the livestock had been sold to other family members. Tobe already had an agreement to sell the horse and wagon to a livery stable in Christiansburg, where they would board the train to Charleston, West Virginia. If the price of land was really as low as they had been told, they had enough money to buy a thousand, maybe two thousand acres. They planned to stay with Stella's brother, Eck, while searching for just the right land to buy.

From Charleston, West Virginia, they took the train to Cincinnati, and from there, another train across Indiana and on up to Chicago. When they left Chicago, Tobe thought, they would really be heading out and into the Wild West of North America, out across Minnesota and North Dakota and into Montana. Fifty years earlier, a move from Virginia to Montana would have been by wagon all the way and would

have taken about three months. But by 1910, thanks to the wonders of America's railroads, this trip was going to take only one week.

Two months after their departure, Edna received a letter from Stella telling everyone back east that they had all arrived in Montana safely. Later, Stella wrote that she and the children were in the railroad town of Saco, where they would stay over the winter. Tobe had purchased a thousand acres of land north of the Missouri River near Fort Peck, and he was out there now, building a house so they could all move out there next summer. When Edna and Dump read about the amount of land that they had purchased, they were astounded. Dump allowed that he couldn't imagine how one family could farm that much land.

For the next few years, the letters to the folks back east were few and far between, as Dump and Edna wondered and worried about how Tobe, Stella, and family were doing. Apparently, the farming and ranching efforts in Montana were not going all that well. The growing season in northern Montana was really short for corn and oats, and it was proving really difficult to plow the buffalo grass sod. Stella's brothers were apparently doing pretty well with their cattle ranching, though, as they now had over six thousand acres. That sounds like a lot of land, but in Northern Montana, that would sustain about six hundred head of cattle.

Not doing so well at ranching, Tobe purchased a well drilling rig, and was soon doing a good business drilling for water on the neighboring ranches. Then, in a story that sounds like a B-grade western movie, Tobe got into a serious altercation with a big-time cattleman. For a number of years, it seems that the cattleman had been buying up cattle from the small ranchers along a trail he had established near the Milk River, and driving the accumulated herd to the stockyards in Saco for shipment to Chicago. The land which Tobe bought had officially belonged to the Blackfoot Indians in the region, but it was range land



Win Barnard, Jim Barnard, and others branding a horse

across which the drover was accustomed to moving the cattle unimpeded, with the cattle foraging and grazing along the way. Now Tobe had fenced a part of that range.

The first year after Tobe had fenced the land, the cattleman and his drovers just cut the fence and drove the cattle through and right across Tobe's land. The next year, Tobe was waiting for the cattle drive at the fence when they arrived, and he warned the drovers to not bring the cattle across his property. When they tried to drive the cattle right through the fence, Tobe shot the cattleman who was heading the drive, though not wounding him seriously.

A couple of months later, the cattleman sent word to Tobe that he was again getting ready to drive his herd across the land, and if he laid eyes on him, Tobe would be a dead man. When the threat was reported



Melon harvest with Sallie Reynolds, Jim Barnard, Annie Barnard, and others

to the local sheriff, the sheriff sided with the cattlemen, telling Tobe that he had no business fencing in that land and if Tobe got shot interfering with a cattle drive, it would be his own fault. The sheriff added that, with a great world war going on and the army needing beef, and it was downright unpatriotic to interfere with the movement of cattle across the range.

Tobe was the newcomer to the area and was on his own, while the cattleman had several ranch hands working for him. Many of the neighboring ranchers also wanted to maintain their easy access across the range to the stockyards at Saco. Almost out of money, Tobe sold the land for what little he could get, while Stella and the children moved back into town. Tobe took the train all the way to Nitro, West Virginia, where he knew he could get a good-paying job at the munitions plant. He had been in Nitro only a few months, when he caught the influenza and died. Tobe's body was shipped to Mayberry for burial, but the family was still in Montana. They could not even attend the funeral.

The only one of Tobe and Stella's children that maintained much of a connection with the folks Back East was the oldest son, Roy. He would bring his family back to Maybeny every few years to visit with his Aunt Edna and Uncle Dump, whom he always remembered with great fondness. But for all those years, Roy could never bring himself to travel the half mile trip up the lane to Kettle Hollow to visit the home place. Roy Yeatts was ten years old when his family left Virginia, and he was twelve or thirteen years old before he officially started school. Stella taught all of her children to read and do arithmetic when they were quite young, and Tobe and Stella always encouraged the children to read. Apparently Roy was an especially bright boy: when he was nineteen, he graduated from high school and promptly married one of his teachers.

As Roy's wife, Helen, continued to teach school, Roy attended the University of Montana in Missoula, graduating in just three years. Helen was a devout

Seventh Day Adventist, and Roy converted to his wife's faith. This church affiliation may have been helpful in his getting accepted to medical school at Loma Linda University in California.

Upon graduation from Medical School, Roy accepted a residency at a hospital in New Orleans,

where he gained a lot of experience in the treatment of Leprosy. Helen, in the meantime, became a registered nurse. After practicing medicine in New Orleans for some years, Roy and Helen accepted a mission call to work with lepers in New Guinea. They worked as a medical team in remote regions of New Guinea for many years. When they were in their mid-seventies, the church which was sponsoring their work required that they retire.

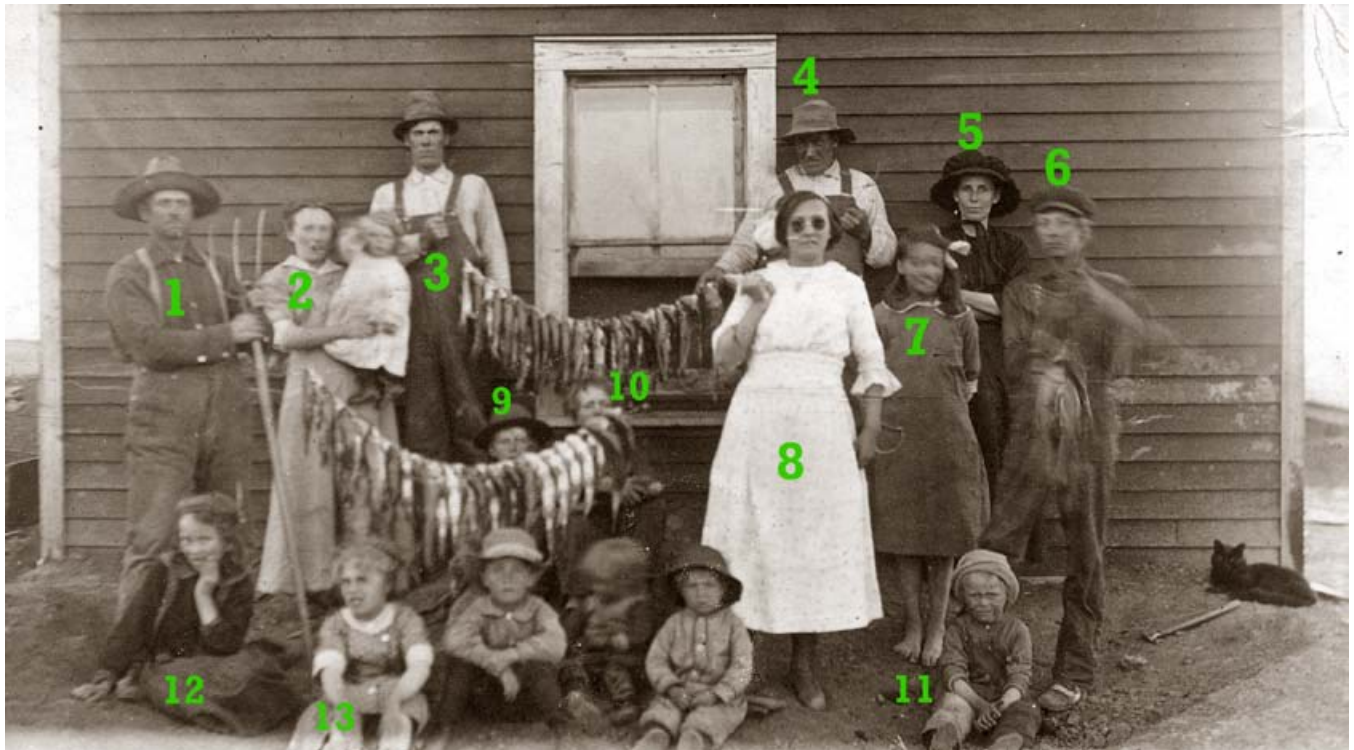
Roy and Helen Yeatts retired to Meadows of Dan, a community near Roy's childhood home of Mayberry. Shortly after his arrival in Meadows of Dan, Roy drove to Mayberry and parked his car in front of the old house where his dear Uncle Dump and Aunt Edna had lived when he was a child. From there, he walked the half-mile pilgrimage up the lane to Kettle Hollow. There he stood, for the first time in seventy years, in front of the little two-room house in which he was born. "You know," Roy said softly, tears welling in his eyes, "I believe I must have taken the long way home."



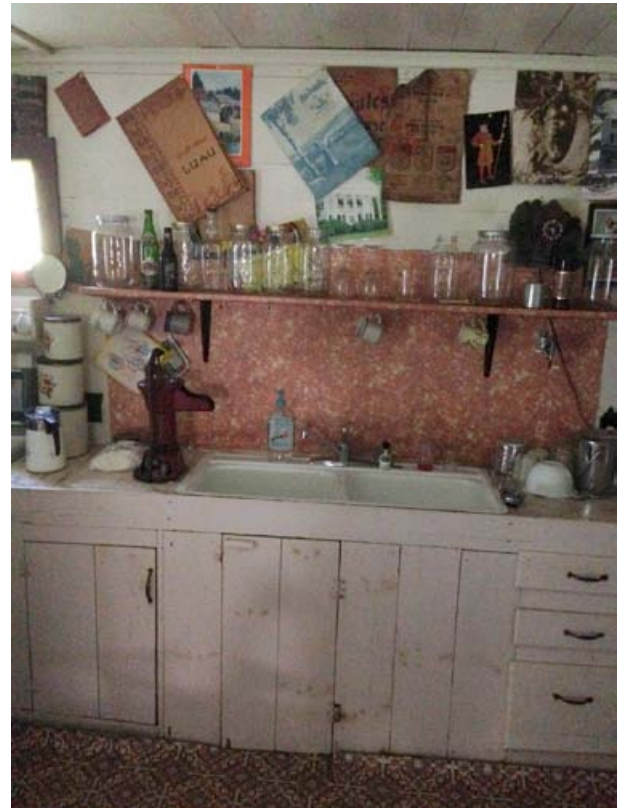
Roy Yeatts



Nitro, WV and its WW I munitions plant



1. Tobe Yeatts, 2. Sallie Barnard Reynolds, 3. Talmadge Reynolds 4. John T. Winifred Barnard, 5. Annie Barnard, 6. Roy Yeatts, 7. May Yeatts 8. Verne B. ??, 9. Lucien Reynolds, 10. Foy Yeatts, 11. Tom ??, 12. Amy Yeatts 13. Anice Reynolds



Three views of Tobe's house in Virginia