

# Things In Motion

*All is change; all yields its place and goes.*  
--Euripides (485?-406BC)



The true wisdom is to be always seasonable, and to change with a good grace in changing circumstances.  
--Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894)

**A**S COOLER DAYS of autumn creep forth on hesitant feet, I am happily swept back to my childhood days for a spell of nostalgia in the farmlands of Georgia, to a time which now is buried under the dead leaves of many long ago autumns, a time pushed back in history; and lost to all but a few refugees like myself. As we, the last leaves upon the tree, drop into obscurity, all personal memories of that time will eventually fade away as will we, and what was once a wondrous and exciting time moves into history where that wonder and excitement is relegated to the imaginations of those who may someday read about it. It is a sad end, but valid evidence that all things change. It is life as we know it, and we are greatly blessed to have made our way from birth to death in it.

Admittedly, I have a selfish purpose in my continuous accounts of my early life: I want my descendants to know more about me and what tragedies and triumphs I faced. The sad fact is that not many people record their own memoirs, which deprives the generations that follow of important family history. One very personal example of that is the fact that there is no record now of exactly where my great grandfather Singleton is buried. How sad!

Halloween to kids in the country consisted of an annual Halloween Carnival at the school. It was always held on the last Friday night before October 31<sup>st</sup>. There were the usual games and fun activities, plus each class presented a one-act play in the auditorium—this was known as “Stunt Night,” and was the highlight of the evening. There was no “Trick or Treat.”

Fall, in those days, meant great changes on the farm. By late August, cotton was being picked by the field hands, and peanuts were plowed up, the dirt was shaken off and the peanut bushes with the peanuts still attached were stacked on poles to dry before being threshed, weeks later. Corn was often the last crop to be harvested; it simply dried in the fields until the other crops were harvested. The majority of the harvest was done by hand until farms became mechanized in the 1950s. When cotton was picked, it was stored in a barn, and young kids, black and white, were allowed to play in the cotton, so long as we made sure to “turn” it, thus preventing excess heat and the possibility of spontaneous combustion. When enough cotton was stored to make a bale, it was taken to a gin. Approximately 1500 pounds of picked cotton would produce a bale of about 500 pounds as well as the seeds, which were usually sold to the gin owner.

Peanuts were eaten either green or dry, so kids usually went home at days end with their pockets full, both on the days when digging and stacking occurred as well as on the days when the dried peanuts were threshed. Both jobs left the workers covered with dirt. Threshed peanuts were taken to a peanut mill as soon as the threshing was finished. The stack poles were piled up to be used the following year. Hay was

baled from the dry stalks and leaves that were left in the threshing operation—a hay baler was parked behind the thresher and powered by the same tractor which powered the thresher. The bales of hay were stored in barn lofts to be used as feed for mules and cows. For weeks after a peanut crop was harvested, the thresher site was a gathering place for birds who loved the peanuts that were scattered about the area.

At one time, the corn stalk leaves, known as “fodder” was pulled and baled for use as feed, but that practice became obsolete in the 1940s. Corn was pulled from the stalks by hand and stored in barns for use as feed for the animals as well as for the grinding of meal for cooking bread. Larger farms usually combined corn with other feed products and ground a mix to be used as feed.

In an average year, all the harvesting was done before Christmas, but where planting was late, the harvest might extend into January. A common event of farm life was known as “hog killing day” and was one of the busiest days of the year on a farm. It usually occurred in late November after the weather had turned cold for the duration of winter. Farmers would have selected a number of hogs to butcher when the time was right, and the assigned crew would gather early, often before sunrise. Water was heated in large drums and several washtubs were lined up and filled with hot water from a large washpot. In good time the selected hogs were dispatched, scalded, and scraped clean of hair, then, after gutting, the carcass was cut into the various sections of meat while the organs and intestines were washed clean by the women in the crew. Certain fatty parts were cooked in the washpot to produce lard and cracklings. Other parts went into the grinder to make into sausage, using the intestines as the sausage casings. The hams, shoulders, and sides were packed in salt until they were ready to be cured. Sausages were hung in the smokehouse where they would be smoked over a hickory wood fire, the same as the larger cuts would be after they were heavily coated with the farmer's own formula for curing. Farmers were secretive about their curing mixtures.

The main business of the day would be done before work stopped that day, but there were a few ancillary jobs that were still to be finished. The hogs head was usually made into souse or a similar gelatinous loaf. The pigs feet were an added job, requiring great cleaning and cooking or pickling. If Thanksgiving were near, a fresh ham would be boiled for that occasion, and there was always a cured ham from the year before to be cooked. In my part of the country, turkey was seldom a part of Thanksgiving. A large hen was often made into “chicken and dumplings” as a part of the meal. Pumpkin was also not a part of the feast, although there was always a variety of cakes and pies to complete a large table full of good things to eat.



In looking back, I treasure my memories of a time when life was more simple, yet there will come a time when the present days will be similarly treasured and looked back upon. All will give way to a successor—that's just life.

Number 64

Fall 2009

Published by  
Hugh Singleton  
at 102 Azalea Trail  
Leesburg, FL 34748

*May you enjoy the  
blessings of Thanksgiving!*