

My Daddy was a Good Farmer

By Missy Jones

My Daddy was William Cornelius "Will" Cox, and my mother was Minnie Steward Cox. Will was the son of Cornelius Nicholas "Nick" Cox and Mary Jane "Mollie" Johnson Cox.

When we lived on "The McCullough Place", when I was a young girl, my Daddy planted peanuts, raised sudan and corn and watermelons. This was in the big field south of our house. We also had a good garden site, closer to the house, and to the north east of the big field. Daddy would fertilize the garden site with chicken manure and that soil was so rich that when he raised Irish potatoes, the potato vines were so green they were almost black. Daddy loved to raise sweet potatoes. He would hitch up a horse to the garden plow, a walking plow and plow up the rows into raised beds. He would go to town and buy sweet potato slips, and would walk down the rows with a broom handle and punch a hole in the top of the bed. Maxine and I would walk along behind him, with the potato slips, drop a slip, root end down, into the hole, and step on the dirt and pack it down good around the roots.

When the potatoes got ready to dig, Daddy would plow them up. Before cold weather, he would make a thick layer of corn stalks, pile the sweet potatoes on the stalks, and cover the potatoes with corn stalks, and then a thick layer of dirt over that. We would go out, dig in the side of the stack for however many potatoes that we wanted and cover the stack back up. This pile never froze and were the best sweet potatoes that I have every eaten. Sometimes, when Maxine and I walked home from the bus line in cold weather, Mama would have a fire in the kitchen stove and she would have baked sweet potatoes for us to eat. What a memory!

We always had big gardens and canned and preserved lots of garden stuff. We had a big cellar with wooden shelves and it was nothing for us to have 300 or 400 jars of canned vegetables and fruits. Earlier Mama and Daddy canned vegetables in cans, but not when we lived on this place.

Daddy loved to raise tomatoes. He would buy some tomato plants in town, and sometimes they were little yellow bell tomatoes and Mama would make sweet tomato preserves out of them. They were so good, with hot biscuits, and good cow butter. Sometimes, Daddy would save the tomato seeds from the year before, spread them out to dry and save them in glass fruit jars sealed up good. He might buy some new seeds in packages that he had seen advertised. He would plant the seeds in big tubs, just spread the seed around, and would water them with a bucket that he had punched holes in the bottom of the bucket. That way, the water was gentle enough that it didn't wash away the baby tomato plants. I remember that Daddy would water the new plants that he had set out, but not the big garden, or not the corn, pinto beans and blackeyed peas that he had planted in the big field. I don't remember that we ever had a crop to fail for want of rain.

When I was a girl, one of my jobs was to check the tomato vines for worms. Does anyone out there remember the big fat green worms that would be on tomato vines? They could strip the leaves off of a vine before you knew it. I hated those things. I would pull them off of the vines and squash them. Daddy would give me a penny for every worm killed. Boy, I thought I was rich.

We canned lots of pinto beans, and we loved to can "shellies". These were fat beans on the vine and when they were just right, we would pick those, shell them and can the "shellies". We also put up lots of blackeyed peas. When we had all of the pintos and the blackeyed peas, fresh, that we wanted to pick, Daddy would leave the rest of the beans and peas on the vine to dry.

He would spread out a wagon sheet on the ground by the garden. We would pick the beans and peas off of the vines, spread them out on the wagon sheet and on a good windy day, we would "winnow" them. We would step on the vines, throw them up in the air and the wind would blow away the chaff and the peas and beans would fall back onto the wagon sheet. We would store the peas and beans in cans that were, hopefully, weevil proof.