

Annie Coleman Proctor

Annie Coleman Proctor, a name that county genealogists a generation earlier always spoke with reverence, is little known today, but the time and attention that she put into capturing and preserving family history in our county almost defies description.

Imagine that you are canning in your kitchen in the Paint Rock Valley in 1950 when the woman at the left in this photo knocks on your door and asks if your family has Bible records that she could copy. And she pulls out notebook paper and a pencil and copies the information about your family. Because this woman performed the arduous, selfless act, and many times over the next years, hundreds of family histories that might have been lost have instead made their way into the Church of Latter Day Saints genealogy collections. Her collection was microfilmed in 1978 by The Genealogical Society of Salt Lake Utah.

Annie Elizabeth (called Annie Lizzie) Coleman was born October 14, 1884 in Walterhill, Rutherford County, Tennessee to a farmer named Nathaniel Miller Coleman and his wife Florence Clarabell Miller. She was the middle child of three children, with an older brother and younger sister. She grew up in Rutherford County, and worked in the post office. She was a 35-year-old spinster working as a clerk in the post office in the 1920 census, living with her parents.

While working in the post office, she met a young widower named Jesse Proctor who came into the post office on business. "He met Annie on a business trip to Tennessee,"

Judith Rives, her great granddaughter, explained. "Annie worked at the local post office, and Jesse bought livestock by the boxcar load and had them shipped by train to Scottsboro." Jesse had lost his young wife to tuberculosis six years earlier in 1921, leaving him with three sons: John born in 1906, Thomas Worth born in 1907, and Finis Dozier born in 1910.

As fate would have it, father and son married on the same day. Judith tells the story of these two weddings: "Son John Will married Caroline Carpenter at her parents home in Scottsboro at 9:00 on Thursday morning, and left immediately after the ceremony with John Will's father, Jesse, for Murfreesboro where his bride, Annie Coleman, was waiting." Caroline was still wearing the 'navy blue georgette dress with gold trimmings' that she had bought in Chattanooga for her wedding. When they met up with Annie for the second wedding of the day, much to everyone's surprise, Annie was wearing an identical dress. Annie's dress had been purchased in Nashville, so it was a coincidence, but showed they had similar tastes. After the Murfreesboro cemetery, the two couples went on their honeymoon together in Nashville and the women became fast friends."



Annie Coleman Proctor with husband Jesse and Jesse's mother Sarah Rhonda Jane Sanders Proctor in 1934. Photo from Judith Rives.



Annie as a young woman with her aunt, uncle, and cousin.

When Jess and Annie married on July 27, 1927 in Murfreesboro, Annie was 42. The *Progressive Age* write-up described her as “a most charming and accomplished young woman” who received a hearty welcome in Scottsboro. (*PA*, Jul 7, 1927) Judith remembers Annie, whom she called “Nanny,” from her childhood. Annie and Jesse built a house on Highway 35 between Section and Scottsboro, which is gone now.

As the children grew up and left home, Annie began the work for which all of us in Jackson County remember her. “Annie became very active in genealogical research in the days before computers and digital records were available,” Judith explains. “Research then included personal letters and interviews, and courthouse and cemetery searches. The Annie Coleman Proctor Collection at the Scottsboro Public Library includes the information she gathered in her research.”

One of the people who has made the greatest use of Annie’s research is Christine Paradise Sumner. Christine was one of the people who indexed Annie’s collection of notebooks prior to its being copied and made available in the Scottsboro Public Library. Christine often cited in Annie’s records in her newspaper column, “They Passed This Way.” While indexing the collection, Christine wrote, “We hope that each person who uses Mrs. Proctor’s papers will fully appreciate all the years and years she put into collecting these old records. She worked tirelessly for over thirty years collecting and arranging these records, beginning in the 1930s. Many, many of her records were typed and in alphabetical order. Many others were handwritten notes....Mrs. Proctor was the step-mother of Worth and Dozier Proctor in Scottsboro. The family was very cooperative in letting us copy her papers.” (*Daily Sentinel*, Jan 5, 1972). I understand, though cannot confirm, that the originals of her records were given to the LDS. Bound photocopies are found in the Scottsboro Public Library, though they are rapidly fading. There is also a set of photocopies at the Scottsboro-Jackson Heritage Center. I will try to digitize them over the next year and put them on the JCHA website.

Annie died July 6, 1965. At her death, Bertha Kirby and Elma Benson penned a resolution of respect for Annie regarding her role in the Daughters of 1812, where Annie was a charter member and chaplain. Among her many accomplishments, Annie located 25 graves in the county of U. S. War of 1812 veterans. The chapter placed a book in the library in Annie’s honor. (*Sentinel-Age*, Sep 16, 1965)

Ann Chambless, cofounder of the Jackson County Historical Association and 42-year newsletter editor, paid tribute to Annie in the *Chronicles*: “Mrs. Jess (Annie Coleman) Proctor made many significant contributions to the preservation of Jackson County history, and her cemetery records are probably the most valued single collection in the Scottsboro Public Library. She spent twenty or more years locating and recording grave markers in every burial plot she could get to in this area. Now her records are absolutely invaluable.”

Annette Bradford and Judith Rives



Annie in her Garden. Photo from Judith Rives.



Caroline Carpenter Proctor holding her son John Will Jr. and Annie Coleman Proctor holding her step-granddaughter Carol Ann, about 1933. Photo from Judith Rives.