

The Cooper Clan

A story of
John and Mary C. Murchland Cooper Family

Courtesy of Fort Vance Historical Society

The Cooper Clan-Ghosts of Eldersville's Past-Part I

By June Campbell Grossman

They lived in the big rambling frame house on the edge of town-the two of them with their four young daughters. He was descendant of one of the most prominent families of the area. McFarland's Twentieth Century of Washington County published in 1910 states that John Cooper was one of four sons of Erasmus and Elizabeth Patterson Cooper and was born at Bellview, Allegheny County on February 8, 1836. John was the eldest child was subsequently followed by William, Robert P., and Henry C. who was born on May 5, 1845. The following year after the birth of Henry, Elizabeth died. Erasmus Cooper then gave up his farm near Bellevue and moved to Massillon, Erasmus married Mary Elizabeth Logan and they had one daughter, Mary Elizabeth who eventually settled in California. At the time, transportation facilities were very poor but Erasmus with his second family moved to Iowa, traveling down river from Steubenville by boat to St. Louis and thence to a farm near the boundary of DesMoines, Iowa, where he lived until his death on November 4, 1856. He was buried in DesMoines. William and Robert accompanied their father to Iowa but William, who never married, returned at a later date and died on August 6, 1895, at the age of 62. He was buried in the family plot of John Cooper in the cemetery of the Eldersville Methodist Church. (The above statistics as quoted from McFarland's history coupled with information on the Cooper gravestones would indicate that William was born in 1833. This would place him, Be that as it may, when Erasmus migrated to Iowa, both John and Henry C. remained behind, settling in Eldersville, Pennsylvania.

It was Henry C. Cooper, and not John, who was chosen as a representative citizen of Jefferson Township to be written up in McFarland's history. Those who knew the brother well have no questions as to the ultimate choice.

Henry C. was known as a devout, religious man – a pillar in the Eldersville Methodist Episcopal Church. He attended school at Eldersville and at Sharpsburg and was engaged in the mercantile business for 35 consecutive years in Eldersville where he was owner and operator of a thriving store which served village people and farmers for miles around. He was assisted by his brother John until 1890 when John retired. Henry continued in the business until 1902 when he sold the store to Boles and Gorley. (W.M. Truax of Eldersville recalls that his father, Cam Truax, had intentions of purchasing the Cooper store but other circumstances arose and Mr. Truax reconsidered and decided against the purchase. He was to buy the business for the outlandish sum of \$325.)

McFarland's history also describes Henry C. as a man of ample fortune, a stockholder in the Washington National Bank of Burgettstown, the owner of considerable town property and owner of his grandfather Patterson's farm of 191 acres. (James Patterson, Henry's maternal grandfather, came from Ireland with his wife in 1793 and lived to be 92 years of age.) Henry was married on December 18, 1889, to Carrie Virginia McCarrell, a daughter of Thomas and Elizabeth McComb McCarrell. (They resided on the farm known today as the Wargo farm in Jefferson Township and currently owned and occupied by Mary Wargo Ihnat.) Her grandfathers, Thomas McCarrell, Sr. and Captain John McComb, were Revolutionary War soldiers.

Henry and his wife probably lived in the apartment over the store during their first years in Eldersville, but in 1892 Henry built a large beautiful house on the hill overlooking his beloved Eldersville Church. The house was later owned and occupied by George Parr and Dorcie Gaines. Its current owners, James and Dorothy Petrel, have recently renovated its entire exterior, preserving in excellent taste the original beauty and grandeur bequeathed it by its builder, Henry Cooper.

Henry and his wife, Carrie, might have been parents of fortunate children who could have claimed the beautiful mansion on the hill, the acres of rolling farm land, and the sizeable fortune their parents possessed as their rightful inheritance. With such a long line of stalwart forebears, it seems reasonable to assume that the children of Carrie and Henry Cooper would have been blessed indeed. But fate had other plans. Henry did not marry Carrie until he was 45 years of age. The age of Carrie at her time of marriage has been lost in the pages of time. So it was that the two of them were to remain the childless occupants of the big house on the hill all the days of their lives until Henry's tiny, hunched-backed body was laid to rest in the old cemetery at Bethel Church, the tall granite monument to his memory rising in plain view of an observer approaching the meticulously cared-for garden of rest.

Henry's brother, John, came to earth with the same credentials as his brother. Indeed, he seemed more blessed than Henry, whose great misfortune it was to be born with a hunch back. John laid claim to the same long line of prominent ancestors dating back to the Revolutionary War times. He also possessed a sizable fortune attest to the fact that at his death he bequeathed to each of his four living daughters the amount of \$40,000 – an ample fortune of \$40,000 – an ample fortune in the days of the early 1900's. John's joint owner with Henry of the Eldersville merchant business and owner of the large frame house on the edge of town owned and occupied today by Helen Scott. Unlike his brother, John was not to remain childless. Over the years, he and his wife, Mary

C. Murchland Cooper, were to become the parent so of six daughters. Their daughter Elizabeth was born on July 6, 1875 and lived only until August 3. Her tiny body was laid to rest in the cemetery directly behind the Eldersville Methodist Church. On July 22, 1876, another daughter, Sarah, was born. Sarah survived less than a year and a half, passing away the day before Christmas in 1877. She was laid to rest beside her sister. Perhaps the heartbreak at the death of these two little girls was a scar from which John and Mary never quite recovered. At any rate, not even the birth of four healthy daughters which followed these tragedies could bring the John Cooper household to the fruition one would have expected. With material wealth behind him and the prospect of descendants ahead of him, one might well have assumed that John Cooper was favored indeed. But somewhere along the line, something went wrong. Unlike Henry, John seldom set foot inside the little country church at the bend in the lane. Perhaps the marriage did not fulfill the hopes and dreams he once believed it would. John's wife, Mary, "was a Murchland, and the Murchlands' had a reputation for being hard to get along with." Yet certainly Mary had reason enough to be disillusioned with life, having buried her first two children and giving birth to six within the space of little over six years. For whatever reasons, John Cooper spent more and more time with the bottle, becoming more and more disillusioned as the years went by.

Mary H., the oldest surviving child of John and Mary Cooper was born on June 17, 1878, and spent her entire lifetime at the family home until the death of her parents when she went to reside with her sister, Awilda. Young Mary had been warned repeatedly by her mother that all men had evil intents and spinsterhood was to be preferred over the so-called wedded bliss. Whether Mary was an obedient child or simply never attracted a young man's fancy is not known. At any rate, she remained single until her death in March 25, 1947, and was laid to rest beside the body of her father in the cemetery at Eldersville.

Awilda grew to young womanhood and although she also was constantly bombarded with warning from her mother concerning the evils of matrimony, she disregarded her mother's pleas and married Ernie Campbell of Avella. Ernie was a lovable, highly respected man endowed with a beautiful singing voice which he consistently used to sing praises to his maker at the Presbyterian Church in Avella. To Ernie and Awilda was born one son, Samuel Campbell. Sam was later to inherit the family lumber business which remains a landmark in Avella today. Awilda's disposition, like that of her mother, left much to be desired. She hated all men in general and her husband in particular and it was common knowledge that on several occasions had attempted to poison him. One Sunday after church, having sung a duet with the Cheesebrough girl, Ernie

went home, had a cup of coffee and collapsed. No investigation into his strange and sudden death was ever made, but residents of Avella and family members to this day declare that Awilda silently and swiftly sent him to his death. Perhaps for the sake of young Samuel, or perhaps the family fortune was great enough to assure there would be no scandal, the case was considered closed. Ernie Campbell was dead. No amount of speculation could bring him back. It remained for his son, Sam, to carry on the family name and the blood line of the Coopers. But although Sam was to marry twice in his life time, he never produced an heir.

The Cooper Clan-Ghosts of Eldersville's Past-Part II

By June Campbell Grossman

(The author speaks herewith from personal experience, having spent two or three years in the Brown household as a roomer while teaching in the McDonald public school system.

Nettie Cooper almost fulfilled her mother's hopes of remaining unmarried. Almost, that is. But when Nettie was twenty-four years of age, she met young David Clyde Brown of Avella. And although D.C. as he was later called, was only sixteen years of age, she eloped with him, an act which nearly caused the total collapse of her mother. Although Net did not heed her mother's warning about marriage, she did remember her admonitions that to conceive a child was the greatest disgrace that could befall any woman – married or otherwise. IT was therefore with loud lamentations, tears, threats, and temper tantrums that Net announced to her husband that she was in the family way – a disgrace he had placed upon her from which she most certainly would never recover. True to her predictions, Lorin Brown was born – a quiet, reserved young man, highly intelligent, but never rigged physically. Although Nettie's marriage to D.C. Brown survived their near death in the flood of 1912 and his subsequent rise to fortune in his own right, it never recovered from her firm conviction that all men were, indeed, devil. Upon the birth of Lorin, Nettie moved her belongings from her husband's bedroom and announced that she had no further intentions of consorting with him in any manner except verbally – a promise she was to keep during the 60 plus years of their so-called wedded life. D.C., at the age of 29 was appointed president of the bank in McDonald, Pennsylvania, the youngest man of the day ever to be thus honored. He spent more and more time with his business life, amassing a small fortune of his own.

Net did concede to giving him a small part of her inheritance from her father to start him on his way in the world of investments, a fact which partially explain why he never divorced her. He declared later in life that "it was easier to live in hell than it is to make a change" and that his mother had asked him never to disgrace her by getting a divorce – two rationalizations which he used to explain away his unhappy marital state – whenever the subject came up.

Nettie and D.C.'s son, Lorin, was given all the advantages money could buy – the best education, the best home and surroundings. But although they each adored him to the point of worship, they could not put aside their personal feelings for each other and give him a home where love could abound. Thus Lorin grew up in an atmosphere of cold restraint and constant disagreement. Early in his early forties, he became suddenly very ill. Coupled with the existing estrangement of her husband, his mother became addicted to alcohol. She had been crippled very severely by arthritis and suffered constantly from pain. Her personal physician had placed her on a chronic medication for relief of the excruciating pain which was a strong alcohol content. He many times indicated to the family that he was at fault for her addiction. On one occasion she locked herself into her room and then drank herself into a state of "snake. In an attempt to reach his mother who was screaming frantically, Lorin threw himself against the door, breaking it down. In the process, he severely bruised his side which struck the doorknob. He never completely recovered from the bruise. Shortly thereafter his condition was diagnosed as terminal cancer. Although Lorin married a lovely girl and lived a few short years in apparent happiness with her, the radiation treatments required by his illness assured he would never leave a descendant. One dark day in his middle forties, Lorin Brown, only child of Nettie Cooper Brown, passed silently into the oblivion of death – leaving behind two totally heartbroken parents who each loved him with a passion unmatched by anything in their lives, and yet each gleaning not a single strand of comfort from the presence of the other. A mutual friend who was present at Lorin's death recalled that seeing these two people – at opposite ends of a hospital corridor-flooded with tears at the loss of their only son but having absolutely not a single word of comfort for each other, was the saddest commentary on human misery she had ever experienced.

Lorin Brown was buried on the hill above McDonald and his parents returned from his grave to pick up the fragments of their broken lives where they had left them strewn. Net turned more and more to showering her affection on her sister's child, Sam Campbell. D.C. continued to accumulate wealth, take trips to the sulky races, and begin to invest in race horses of his own. During the years following Lorin's death, the couple continued their pat-

tern of either ignoring each other completely or entering into competition with each other to get the better of an argument.

One of Nettie's greatest ambitions in life was to outlive her husband in order that she might guarantee that his fortune did not go to his relatives, whom she detested, but instead be passed to her beloved nephew, Sam Campbell. She felt that inasmuch as she had given D.C. his start in life financially, she had a right to whatever accumulations may have come from her original investment. Upon occasion, she went to Iowa to visit cousins and became seriously ill. Her physician phoned her husband to say she was in a coma, had suffered a severe cerebral hemorrhage, and could not possibly recover. He should come at once if he expected to see her alive again. He took the next plane west. What the doctor had failed to reckon with was Net's determination. Not only did she recover from the stroke, but she returned home to a physical state equal to that prior to her near demise. She later commented that she had no intention of dying before her husband.

As the couple passed into the twilight years of their lives, they mellowed somewhat in their treatment of each other. On some occasions they would have friends in for an evening of bridge. The worst thing that could possibly happen was that at some time during the course of the evening they should find themselves as partners. When this event occurred, Net would immediately make some outlandishly large bid which would appear to all observers impossible to play. D.C. would become infuriated at the prospect of losing and would promptly indicate his feelings verbally. Yet, invariably, at the last moment, her tint frail little hand would pull out the final card, taking the last trick and the game. She would simply smile that triumphant little smile of her and he would storm out of the room in a rage. He often said when he later calmed down, that he never saw her fail to win at bridge when he knew she couldn't possibly, and he never saw her fail to make money on an investment he knew was doomed to failure.

The Cooper Clan-Ghosts of Eldersville's Past-Part III **By June Campbell Grossman**

Nettie Cooper Brown was an attractive woman even in her advanced years, being possessed of a flawless complexion and sparkling blue eyes. The crippling arthritis which plagued her constantly caused her shoulders to stoop prematurely and she walked with a shuffle seeming to find it difficult to raise

her feet in a natural gait. In addition to this chronic affliction, she also suffered from palsy which caused a steady tremor in her frail little hands. But neither the arthritis nor palsy could in any way detract from the natural prettiness with which she was blessed. In temperament she often displayed a ready wit and warm affection which endeared her to those around her. If she loved you, she would go to no lengths to assure you of her affection. But if she did not like you, then better to be cast into a sea of devils than to be subjected to her wrath. She was sympathetic toward anyone suffering trouble or any affliction and was generous to a fault with those she loved.

An excellent cook even as she approached her eighties, nothing delighted her more than to prepare a meal for a couple of friends – when her husband and was out of town. Yet generally, if he were home, she stayed in bed all day, completely ignoring the fact that he would soon be home from work and no doubt would have enjoyed a home cooked meal. She always excused herself on the grounds that she was scarcely able to get herself in and out of bed, let alone cook dinner in the evening for what she considered to be unappreciative husband. One was never quite certain just how much of the pain she suffered was real and how much was imagined.

(The author hereafter will express the remainder of Part III in the first person, finding it easier to express personal experiences in this manner.)

During the years I spent in the Brown household, I recall many an occasion when Nettie seemed to suffer terribly from arthritis and cold scarcely shuffle her feet across the living room floor. On such occasions I would offer to help her upstairs to bed. She would gratefully accept, leaning on me for support and appearing very frail as we slowly mounted to the second floor, step by laboring step. Once inside her room, I would help her to undress for bed, and tucking the covers around her, offer to get her a drink of water and inquire if I could do anything further for her. She would give me various little chores adjusting the shades or the night light or arranging her medication. Then closing her eyes, she would call goodnight in a feeble and barely audible little voice, apparently drifting off to sleep. I would then either go to my room to work on school papers or join D.C. at the television in the living room. Invariably, it would not be twenty minutes until her tiny little form would pop around the corner of the room, and with her blue eyes shining brightly, declare that she thought she would make herself a slice of toast and a cup of hot tea before retiring for the night.

Many times in the middle of the night I would awaken with a start and feel a presence in the room. Shaking with fear I would flick on the light and secure enough, there was Net, stooping over my bed peering intently into my

face. "I just wanted to be sure you were all right," she would say sweetly, and turning about, would shuffle off to her own room, leaving me totally sleepless and a state of near emotional collapse.

Nettie loved to hear about other people's physical ailments. She also loved equally well to elaborate upon her own. Regardless of what type of pain you might describe to her or what operation you might have gone through, she assured you she understood completely because she also had been afflicted with the very same ailment many times or had agonized through the identical surgery. I once overheard D.C. jokingly tell a male guest, "The only physical misery I ever anyone discuss they had suffered which Net did not immediately assure them that she also had the same complaint, was prostate gland trouble."

Of one were forced to describe Nettie in one word, it would probably have to be "unpredictable". Perhaps because she slept so much during the daylight hours or perhaps because life for her must have been dull and uneventful, Net was always oblivious of time. I shall never forget being awakened one night by a strange sound which seemed to be coming from the basement. I turned on my light and a glance toward my clock revealed it was 3:30 a.m. I slipped into the hall in time to see D.C. in robe and slippers sneaking down the stairs. He too, had apparently been awakened by the strange noises. He instructed me in a whisper to go back in my room and lock the door. "And for God sake, don't wake Net! There must be a burglar in the basement.

I obeyed, huddled in my bed in morbid fear of my own life and certain the intruder would strike D.C. dead. Time seemed eternal before I finally heard him coming back to bed, stomping loudly back up the stairs and muttering to himself. I unlocked my door and stuck my head cautiously into the hall. "What was the noise?" I inquired. D.C. stopped in his tracks about seven steps from the top of the stairs and peered up at me thru the open banister. "You're not going to believe this," he said, "But I'll be damned if it wasn't Net down in the basement."

"But it's almost four o'clock in the morning!" I chimed in. "What in the world is she doing down there?"

For a moment he did not answer. He simply came on up the stairs and went into his room as if he did not intend to say any more. Finally he turned around and looked down the hall to where I waited silently. Then in a voice as matter-of-fact as if he were telling me the time of day, he said, "She's at the old sink down there, scouring some pots and pans she brought from the old Cooper farm fifty years ago."

Perhaps it was the expression of incredulity which must have been written on my face or perhaps his marvelous sense of humor came awake again.

“Go back to bed, honey.” He said. “Everything’s all right”. And as he closed his door, I heard him chuckle to himself as if he had actually enjoyed the whole episode, “She’s one hell of a woman!”

The Cooper Clan-Ghosts of Eldersville’s Past-Part IV

By June Campbell Grossman

The years I spent in the D.C. Brown household as a young schoolteacher were filled with mixed emotions for me. I recall distinctly my first impressions of the place. I had met only Nettie prior to moving in and had heard from her only tales of what a heartless and disagreeable man her husband was. On that basis I approached the first day of school that year in the mid-fifties with a great deal of apprehension.

I moved in with my meager belongings during the daylight hours of the daylight hours of the day preceding the opening of school while D.C. was still at work at the bank, hoping to postpone meeting him for as long as possible. Net was delighted to have me and showed me graciously to the “round” bedroom which was to be my place of abode for the next several school years. It was furnished with an old fashion chest of drawers and iron twin beds. A small night stand with lamp and alarm clock stood between them. A couple of straight backed chairs completed the decor. A small built-in clothes closet had been cleared of its possessions in readiness for the new roomer.

As I unpacked my things, Net sat on the edge of the bed and told me how pleasant it would be to have a young person around again. She told me of the days when her son, Lorin, was alive and the joy it was for her to have her nephew, Sam Campbell, come to visit Lorin – tales I was to hear repeated over and over again thru the coming years – tales of the days that had gone and would never come again, making more forlorn and gloomy than ever the reality of her terrible aloneness and need to be loved. She was so small and delicately fragile and I was already becoming very fond of her and certain I would always be partial to her side of the marital problems I knew existed for her I knew existed for her and D.C. She reiterated again the fact that D.C. was very hard to please and I should stay out of his way as much as possible as he became almost violent if he were disturbed. She also told me that the extent of my rooming experience with them would be solely determined by the impression I made upon him.

As I would be eating my meals down at the corner restaurant, I could arrange my schedule to avoid that of D.C. I would arise early, leave the house before he got out of bed and return in the evening after he had eaten his evening meal and retired to his home office in the round room on the first floor beneath my upstairs bedroom. A remodeling project was underway when I moved in and there was scarcely a path from the front door to the stairway as the builders worked to install a new kitchen, carpet and drapes. It should not be too hard to avoid meeting the man of the house. But try as I might, the inevitable happened.

Instead of occupying himself in the office, there was D.C. Brown at the front door to meet me. I can still recall that I actually shook with fear at the prospect of meeting him. I can't recall how I thought he was going to look, but I distinctly remember the shock of seeing him for the first time. He was slightly more than medium height and immaculately groomed, moving with a quickness which belied his years and gave him just the touch needed to label him the successful banker which he was. He was not handsome, but yet was strikingly attractive as he peered at me intently with a pair of sparkling blue eyes which seemed almost to be laughing at my apparent discomfiture. He insisted I go to the back yard with him until he should find me a more convenient place to park my old car. I nearly ran over him in my nervousness to please. When I finally got the thing parked and we started back for the house, he paused on the walkway and looked at me with the curious side-like glance which I was to learn was so characteristic of him.

"I'm sure Net has properly read my pedigree to you by this time, young lady," he said in a very open and frank manner. "But give me a little time and you may find I'm not such a bad sort after all. It sure will be good to have a young person around. God knows it's been damned lonesome."

It took the actual living of the next several years for the mighty truth of those words to make their full impact on me.

As soon as D.C. discovered my time for arising in the mornings, he began getting up ahead of me and would be downstairs pattering around in the kitchen when I came down dressed for work and on my way to the coffee shop. Try as I might to slip out undetected, I seldom succeeded. He would meet me at the foot of the stairs and insist that I join him for toast or bacon and eggs. In the beginning it was very embarrassing to me as I was practically speechless in his presence, never seeming to be able to think of a topic of conversation. But as the weeks stretched into months, I grew less leery of him. He would inquire what had transpired in school the day before and I would relate funny little incidents to him which would amuse him to no end. Slowly but gradually a bond

of mutual trust grew up between us. And through the long school term, Net remained upstairs in bed, oblivious of our breakfast tete-a tete.

In the meantime, Nettie began insisting that I not eat my evening meal downtown-a pleasure I did not wish to forego as I would do so in the company of three or four other young schoolteachers with whom I enjoyed a marvelous comradeship. To win her point, Net began preparations for the evening meal very early in the afternoon-an obligation she had chosen to ignore for the past fifty years-and would insist that I come directly from school to eat with them. When I made the excuse that my presence might annoy D.C., she was quick to reply that I had apparently won him over and she was certain that he loved having me there. Nettie could be so appealing in fragile appearance that it was difficult to refuse her anything, and as I was growing very fond of both of them, I sometimes accepted her invitations. I felt that perhaps I was to be the instrument through which these two lovable but estranged persons might grow together in the sunset years of their lives. But fate had other plans. Whatever such dreams or aspirations I may have had they were never to reach fulfillment. Although they mellowed somewhat in their treatment of each other as the years went by, they never achieved any semblance of domestic tranquility. She insisted that he was an unaffectionate, cruel man. He insisted that years ago she had killed all the love he had once had for her. Perhaps they were each too determined never to give in to the other, or perhaps there was just too much water over the dam. At any rate, from the moment I arrived until the day I left the Brown household behind me some few years later, I was never to bridge the chasm between them. As we grew to know each other better, I became torn between my affection for both of them, but I must confess that as time went by, my sentiments grew stronger in favor of D.C.

An example of their total lack of communication with each other was the episode of my monthly room rent. Before I had moved in, Nettie and I had agreed upon \$25 which was the typical price in the area at that time. But as months went by, she began to fret over charging me, insisting that they certainly did not need the money and my company more than compensated for my room. As my take-home pay was \$150 a month and I was repaying my college education, buying a car, taking night classes, she knew it was a financial struggle for me to survive. Yet she was terribly concerned about D.C.'s reaction if she decided not to charge me room rent. In fact, she made quite an issue each month on payday when I gave her money of always handing it over to him in my presence at the dinner table. It was always accompanied by her explanation to him that "it will help with the household expenses". While Nettie was fussing and fuming that she could not conceive of a way to avoid the wrath of her

husband if she did not give him the \$25, unbeknown to her, D.C. had privately stated to me the same feeling. He said he enjoyed having young people in the house so much that he could not charge me for staying, but "Net would have a stroke if you didn't pay her". For a time they each expressed to me these common feelings, yet never, in all the time I stayed, did they ever discuss them with each other, Thus once each month the three of us performed a strange and amusing ritual. I cashed my check and gave Nettie the amount of \$25. At dinner that evening she ceremoniously handed it over to her husband "to help with the household expenses". And as she and I cleared away the dishes, D.C. inconspicuously made his way to the hall closet and put the money back in my coat pocket.

The Cooper Clan-Ghosts of Eldersville's Past-Part V **By June Campbell Grossman**

The years I spent with D.C. and Nettie Cooper Brown were full of surprises, laughter, sadness, and sometimes bewilderment. Had D.C. and I not been able to laugh together at the strange little quirks of Nettie, it is doubtful that either of us would have survived those years and maintained or sanity.

Always an avid reader, I often had books lying around the house which I read in my spare time and discussed over dinner with my friends on the teaching staff. I shall never forget my surprised one evening when Nettie accused me of reading a book which she termed as "off color" and "not fit for a proper young lady to read." and "not fit for a proper young lady to read." D.C. remained totally silent during her lengthy lecture, never once coming to my defense. When Nettie finally ran out of words, he looked at her intently for a moment or two and then in a very quiet tone addressed her. "Net, how do you know it is such a terrible book if you haven't read it yourself?" She never acknowledged she heard him. Instead she excused herself and shuffled off toward the stairway and the security of her room. Eventually we heard her door close with a resounding slam and together we broke into peals of laughter. Later when I regained my composure and had time to reflect on the incident, I commented to him that I could not figure out how she knew what I was reading as I was certain I had never removed that particular book from my suitcase. D.C. turned about in that quick little manner so characteristic of him and peered at me over his bifocals with the curious look which was his own stamp of uniqueness. "Young lady, have you been living here all this time and never

discovered that she goes through your suitcase and all of your belongings at least once a week." I must have shown my shock for as he turned to go he said, more to himself than to me, "If Net thought I had anything to hide, she would go through the bank vaults to find it even if she had to get a federal court order to do it. That's typical of the Coopers. They are curious as hell about other people's business but damned particular about making sure nobody knows theirs."

As the days went by, I discovered how true his words were. Many times I would purposely watch how I placed things in my dresser or suitcase and invariably I would find them moved upon my return from school. Often I would pass D.C.'s upstairs bedroom and find Net eavesdropping on the phone extension as he conducted what he thought was "private" business from his office phone downstairs. Yet she had her own separate private line installed in her bedroom - with an unlisted number!

Net always suspected people of nibbling in her affairs. One evening we had discussing some local history in and around Eldersville and Avella areas and in the course of the conversation I had asked when such-and-such a person had been born. Apparently Nettie thought that I was about to discover her age for she became quite upset when D.C. told me I was welcome to check their copy of a certain history of local families which they possessed. For some reason I decided to wait until the following evening. At that time D.C. went to his study to get me a book, only to discover that Net had cut out an entire section pertaining to the Cooper family. When he confronted her with it, she simply said, "It's nobody's damned business when I was born!"

One thing which irritated Net beyond words was any accusation about her family which D.C. sometimes made in the heat of an argument. It was at just such a time that I first heard I first heard him mention the bit of gossip I had heard since a child from the elderly residents of Eldersville concerning the death of Ernie Campbell, husband of her sister, Awilda. Net was in a terrible frame of mind at the time and was engaged in her favorite pastime of belittling him and hurling accusations against members of his family when he suddenly swung around in fury and screamed at her, "Well, at least I didn't have a sister who killed her husband!" It silenced her completely. She did not refute his statement but went straight to her room and remained there the rest of night. Later, when he cooled off I confronted him. "That was a terrible thing you said to Nettie tonight. Everybody knows that rumor in Eldersville and Avella. But you should not have mentioned it to her." He thought for a moment and then said sadly, "I know I shouldn't have said that, but she makes me so damned mad. But it isn't a rumor, honey. It's the truth. I was there." And proceeded to tell me in great detail the events of that awful day so long ago. When he completed his

story, I couldn't help being greatly disturbed as I had always considered it just a bit of malicious gossip concocted by some bored housewife years before. "Then why in the world didn't somebody do something about it-if the man was murdered. That was a terrible thing to simply ignore a crime like that!" He did not respond. And then because I respected his sense of decency and honor so much I had to ask, "Why didn't YOU do something?"

"Awilda was Net's sister," he said. "any disgrace upon her family would have destroyed Net."

"I thought you didn't care anything about Net." I replied.

He thought for a moment and then looked at me very intently. Then he dropped his voice to the little intimate tone he used when he chose to permit a glimpse at the inner man behind the gruff mask he always wore. "She's my wife," was all he said. But in that small moment of truth I was able to discern what I had suspected all along and what I will always believe-that the problems they had confronted early in their marriage were just too great for them to overcome-each being the disposition he was. And as time had gone by, they fortified their position with insult after insult until it was too late ever to turn back and start over. Neither would give the other the slightest indication that he cared. But beneath it all, and in spite of everything, he still loved her. Neither of us ever mentioned the incident again.

The Cooper Clan-Ghosts of Eldersville's Past-Part VI

By June Campbell Grossman

One summer in the early sixties I again visited the Browns to say goodbye before going to New Jersey for summer school. During the years since I had lived with them, they had fallen into their pattern of agitating each other. I remembered that D.C. seemed depressed and irritable, his usual robustness having vanished since the severe case of hepatitis he had contracted while in the hospital for a routine check-up. They seemed pleased that I had come to see them again, but both of them seemed listless and very tired of life.

Five weeks later I received a phone call from my mother. D.C. Brown was dead. Someone had checked his room when he failed to come down to breakfast and found him in bed, his hand on the phone as if reaching for help. But it was too late. He was gone.

I was in the midst of final exams and a ten hour drive home, There was no way I could possibly return home and complete my summer program for

my master's degree. I knew I would be of little comfort to Nettie whose chief interest in D.C.'s death would be the contents of his will. Things would never be the same in the big house again. The owner who loved life so much and yet missed so much of it was dead. I cried for days.

When I returned home at the end of summer, I went immediately to see Nettie. As I looked back over my associations with her, I wondered what her reactions would be. Perhaps after all, she would be heartbroken at his death. I had always felt that deep down in her heart she loved him – in her own way. I recalled how she would wait for hours near the phone during the long winter evenings when he lived in Florida and we were alone together back home. She knew he would call once a week and she would not have missed those few moments for anything in the world. Yet after each call she would be so disappointed that he had not inquired how she was feeling. What she did not know and what he had sworn me to secrecy never to reveal to her, was that each Thursday night at eight I was to wait at the phone in his office at which time he called me to inquire if things were all right and “is Net all right?” Now I would be able to tell her that he cared. Perhaps it would comfort her. I recalled also that sometimes she had seemed so jealous of him when he gave his attention to another woman. A mutual friend of theirs, an attractive divorcee of near their own age, often called on them and D.C. would give her a big hug and kiss and sometimes pick her up jokingly and carry her from the hallway into the living room while she laughingly protested, Put me down this minute, Clyde Brown, or I'll scream!” and we would all have a good laugh. Although Net always laughed, too, later that evening she would tell me again her favorite tale of the time the three of them had attended a wedding reception and as she was too crippled from arthritis to dance, D.C. would glide across the ball room with Anna, having a great time laughing and teasing he when suddenly took off his necktie and tied it around one of her ankles in a big bow and gaily danced all around the floor with her, singing to the music. Net insisted she was disgraced for life at such display of impropriety. Yet she was always smiled when she told the story as if she secretly admired this man she had married and perhaps wished that the lady in his arms had been his wife.

Such were the thoughts which occupied my mind as I drove to see Nettie that summer evening after D.C.'s death. I shall never forget that night. She was sitting alone in the living room, looking very small and fragile. I put my arms around her and sat beside her, not knowing quite what to say. Her weak little body shook more than usual and her big blue eyes were full of tears. Maybe she really did love him. Then, with her first words, I knew the truth.

"Did you hear?" she said softly, her hands shaking terribly from the palsy. "He cut me off without a cent!"

I was dumbfounded. Her emotion had nothing whatsoever to do with the death of that beautiful man! Her only concern was his money!

Later she explained that he had provided in his will for the money to operate the house including a housekeeper for as long as she lived. But it was true that the bulk of his estate was to go elsewhere.

"If it is the last thing I ever do," she said in that determined way of hers. "I will break his will!"

Whether or not she succeeded, I never knew and never asked. I visited her many times after that, but I refused to discuss D.C.'s estate with her. He was gone. He had existed over 80 years without having lived at all. He had amassed a small fortune, having told me once that he knew his assets amounted to over a quarter of a million dollars. Yet he gained such little pleasure from it. He told me once in a moment of reflection: "Never wait until you can afford something that you really want. Take it when you are young enough to enjoy it! I didn't. I wanted a Cadillac and I wanted to travel, and I wanted to own my own horses. But I waited until I could afford to lose money if the horses didn't work out. But it was too late. I just didn't have the energy or enthusiasm I had when I was young.

I had watched the truth of his words as the years had gone by. His little Adios colt which had cost him \$5,000 in stud fee lived a few weeks, contracted pneumonia, and died. Some of his horses were burned alive in a fire at Arden. The trips he took to the Little Brown Jug and Hambletonian were more tiring than exciting to him. Even in the winters he spent in Florida did not bring the relaxation he had hoped they would. The only dream which seemed to reach fulfillment in age was his desire to own the king of automobiles.

I remember the first time he had confided in me that he wanted a Cadillac. I asked why he didn't get one. His reasoning was that he really didn't need it since his old car was only ten years old and he made it a practice never to buy anything that he really did not need.

"Do as you please," I had told him. "But if I were you, and I wanted a Cadillac, I would get it!"

When I came home the next day, there sat in the backyard in all its glorious splendor. He was like a child with a new toy. He showed us all the marvelous little gadgets it possessed including an automatic dimmer for the headlights. Even Nettie was excited and he took her arm thru his and ushered us both into the front seat beside him and took us for a little spin into the country. We completely forgot to eat dinner!

The Cooper Clan-Ghosts of Eldersville's Past-Part VII

By June Campbell Grossman

Nettie Cooper Brown, the last living daughter of John and Mary Murchland Cooper, succeeded in accomplishing her life's aim – to outlive her husband. Yet after his death, she seemed to frail rapidly. I visited her several times after his passing. On the final occasion I walked through the big house one last time and thought of the memories I would always have of it. I stood once more in front of the picture of Lorin Brown on the mantle and studied it as I had done so many times through the years. Had he lived, might life have been different? Had she produced an heir, what change might it have made in the lives of these two persons who had become so dear to me?

I recalled an occasion when a young woman of their acquaintance visited with her small daughter. The child immediately sensed D.C.'s love of children and bounced herself on his knee, her arms entwined around his neck and entertained him royally. Although her mother insisted she address him as "Mr. Brown", her childish version ended up as "Bown", which presumably was Brown minus the "r". As they took their leave that evening, the little one called back, "Goodbye Bown! I love you!". And as D.C. closed the door behind them, he had turned to me and said, "There should be a law that there has to be a three year old girl in every household at all times." How he would have loved a granddaughter!

I walked to the patio in the back yard and smiles at my recollection of the days when it was built. The three of us had while away many a cool autumn evening on its spacious surface. My most vivid memory was that of coming home one evening to find a couple of men excavating for it. D.C. was busier than usual, bustling about in what was evidently a rare mood. "How was your day?" I called to him, "Great" he straightened from his task and looked over his glasses a mischievous glint in his eyes. "I have two men working on the outside, he continued, "two women working on the inside, and the old lady madder than hell!" And he disappeared around the corner of the house.

I laughed to myself at the memory of that good humored man I had come to love so much in life. I wept at the remembrance of the sorrow and sadness he had experienced with the woman he had chosen for his wife. I could not help recalling one beautiful winter evening when he decided to take us to Pittsburgh to see Cinerama, a new experience at the time. He had called and reserved tickets and together we had managed to get Net dressed and finally into the big black Cadillac. What we had not reckoned with was the tremendous crowd downtown and the distance of the parking lot from the theater. Realizing how

long it would take to get Net out of the car into the lobby, D.C. determined to send me ahead to pick up the tickets. I waited in line for some time. When I finally arrived at the ticket window, I asked for three tickets reserved for Mr. D.C. Brown. The bespectacled gentleman behind the glass hesitated momentarily. Then asked me directly in the eye he said, "And you are Mrs. D.C. Brown?" "Yes, I am." I lied beautifully. He immediately forfeited the coveted treasures. When I stepped away from the window, who should be standing a few feet but Net and D.C.! Neither gave any sign of having heard and we entered the theater for one of the most enjoyable evenings we spent together. Back home later that night, I came downstairs after tucking a very tired Nettie into bed for about the third time. I told D.C. I was going to bed. "Good night," I called over my shoulder from the foot of the stairs. "Good night, Mrs. D.C. Brown," he called in a matter of fact tone. Shocked, I turned around totally embarrassed. He had heard after all. There he stood, still immaculately dressed from the evening out, looking not a day over fifty, a pair of laughing blue eyes looking into my own, Then he came slowly over to the foot of the stairs where I stood and looked me squarely in the eyes, his mood changing to complete seriousness. He put his hands on my shoulders and in a voice I shall never forget, said, "If I were twenty-five again, I'd say that might not have been such a bad idea." It was the nicest compliment I ever received.

The Cooper Clan-Ghosts of Eldersville's Past-Part VIII

By June Campbell Grossman

I visited with Nettie for a long while that evening and was talked of many things. She cried as she had done many times over the years that she was so lonely. Her only living relative, her beloved nephew Sam Campbell, seemed to have so little time for her. She called him incessantly, but he always had an excuse. And on the very rare occasions that he had bothered, he was always in such a hurry to leave, that his visits to her had more of a depressing effect on her than otherwise.

(Note: Upon Nettie's death, Sam Campbell suddenly found time to settle the estate. I called him to ask if I might have a small radio I had given to D.C. as a Christmas present one year. He said he would look for it and call me. I never heard from Sam again.)

Nettie and I walked slowly through the long hallway, the spacious living room and homey kitchen to the back door. It was the last time I was to visit the old house which had been my home for so long. Shortly thereafter, Nettie died.

With the death of Nettie Cooper Brown, there remained only one known living descendant of Erasmus and Elizabeth Patterson Cooper. This was Awilda Cooper Campbell. Although their son, Robert, who had migrated with his father to Iowa in the late 1840's may have produced an heir, there appear to be no records bearing witness to the fact. Their son, William, never married and the youngest child, Henry C., died childless. Only John and his wife Mary Murchland Cooper, produced heirs for Erasmus and Elizabeth. With the death of Nettie, that entire generation of Coopers descendants disappeared.

Nan Cooper, of whom little has been said, is reported to have been of very unpredictable nature, as was true of her sisters. Of a very erratic nature, Nan did not marry until late in life. But eventually she did marry Louis Welker who lived on the farm presently owned and occupied by Steve and Stella Bertovich in Jefferson Township. Later, after Mr. Welker retired from farming, he and Nan moved into the old Cooper homestead on the edge of town in Eldersville. A niece of Mr. Welker, Mrs. Helen Scott is the present owner. His lifetime might pay him their final respects. Sam was the last descendant of those stalwart pioneers, Erasmus and Elizabeth Cooper, who must never have dreamed their blood line would someday become extinct.

Although old timers who remember the four Cooper sisters from Eldersville as being, as one person put it, "tetched in the head", it may be misleading to attribute their very "differentness" to the Cooper bloodline. Their mother was a Murchland, a family also considered to be more than set in their ways. One resident of Eldersville today recalls that Johnny Murchland, brother of Mary Murchland Cooper, apparently had no love for his brother-in-law, John, and on the day of John's burial, as a matter of outright disrespect, plowed corn within close range of the house where John Cooper's funeral was being conducted. Perhaps the family life of John and Mary was so disruptive that the atmosphere created a breeding place for strange quirks of personality, thereby exonerating either the Murchland either the Murchland or Cooper name from blame. For whatever reason, the consensus of opinion of the residents of that quiet little town whose years number eighty or ninety is that the Cooper girls were "different" and as one bright eyed octogenarian told me, "you could write a book about them. But probably no one would print it."

The story of the Cooper Clan should perhaps end where it began - in the rambling house on the edge of the little village of Eldersville. Although Mrs. Scott still occupies the old Cooper homestead, as far as descendants of the word

Cooper name are concerned, it is empty. Perhaps words from Edward Arlington Robinson's poem, "The House on the Hill", can sum it up best.

"They are all gone away.
The house is shut and still.
There is nothing more to say.

Nor is there one today
To speak them good or ill.
There is nothing more to say.

And our poor fancy-play
For them is wasted skill.
There is nothing more to say.

There is ruin and decay
In the house on the hill.
They are all gone away.
There is nothing more to say.

THE END