

Leaves of History



Historic Area : **"The Shades Of Death"**

by Kathryn Slasor

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(Written Summer of 1977)

The snow was deep and fluffy, and crumbled apart like fleecy white clouds as it was kicked along in front of the youngsters' boots. The air was chill, and a brisk winter breeze whipped among the branches of the tall hemlocks. A bright sun, however, broke through the grayness of the day. But in spite of the brilliant sun reflecting on the deep snow, the winter wonderland appeared only in patches where the aged evergreens were not in such abundance, and their boughs not so thick. Great shadows were cast on the banks of snow beneath the huge trees.

If a passerby could have quietly observed the scene, he would have noted a number of paths, fashioned in the snow deliberately so that they led from tree to tree. Somewhere along these paths could be seen a girl and two boys methodically making the rounds of the huge pines, busily engaged in make-believe activities.

Sometimes they trudged from tree to tree empty-handed. But most of the time they galloped along between two long slim bean poles, tied together at one end, the other ends dragging behind in the snow. These poles were their "horses," and they drove them fast and furiously along the snowy paths.

Sometimes a single bean pole was used, representing a one-horse trip. In this case, the rider was straddle of the horse, but could probably cover as much ground as the two-horse driver.

The year was the winter of 1910. The setting was the secluded heavily forested valley known as the Shades of Death. The girl was my mother; the boys, my uncles.

The maze of paths between the pines was their playground, various trees serving as their "houses," others as their barns, henhouses, spring houses and other essential outbuildings on a well-run farm of that period.

Mom remembers the countless winter days spent among the trees. Being the only girl in a family with four boys, she could climb a tall sycamore and carve her initials along with the others. She and the two younger brothers had created a "neighborhood" of their own, each having chosen a select group

of trees to represent his farm. The paths led to the various outbuildings where they did their chores, including feeding and watering their bean pole horses. After the chores were done, they would visit each other, then return to their respective "houses."

Mom, known to her "neighbors" as Carl, recalls that after completing her rounds of her henhouse, barn and springhouse one day, she decided to visit one of her neighbors, Tom, whose make-believe name was Bob. She had already paid a visit to the other neighbor, David, whose playtime name was Earl Miller.

She made her way along the path through the deep snow with both bean pole horses hitched up, to the home of Bob. But Bob was not there. She went to his henhouse, barn and springhouse, winding her way with her horses from tree to tree without success.

When she ran across him later in the day, she told him about her attempts to visit him, and asked where he had been. The five-year-old stared at his sister in disbelief and squeaked, "Why, didn't you know I'd moved?"

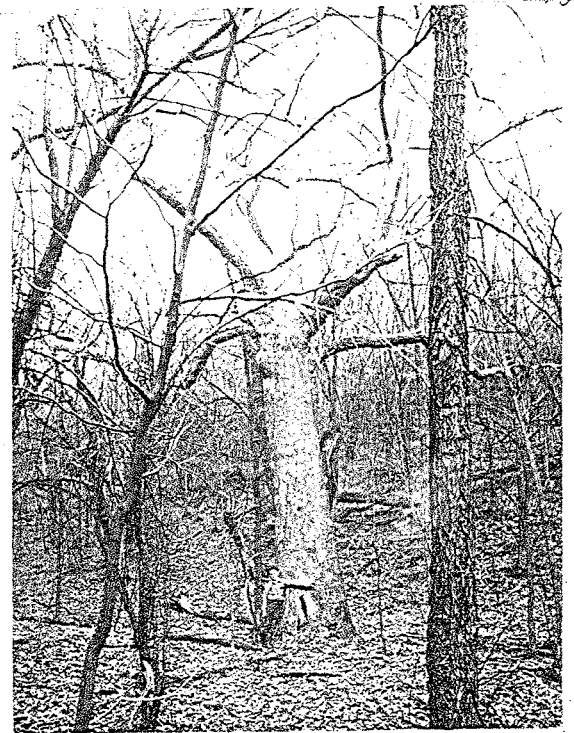
Uncle Tom was probably the most unfortunate child of the family. Being the youngest, he must attempt to keep pace with Mom and Uncle David, who were nine and seven at the time of the family's moving to the Shades of Death. He must also bear the brunt of their mischievous jokes.

Mom has told us of the summer days when the three of them would while away their time doing many things. In berry season, a favorite pastime would

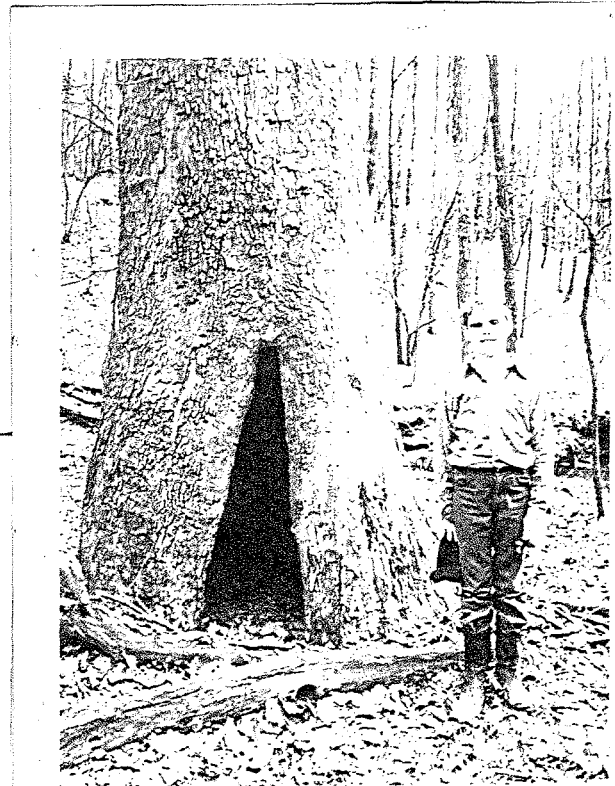
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This picture shows the large cavity at the base of the old sycamore tree in the Shades of Death. The tree is hollow to the top, and evidence of animals using it as a home and shelter can be seen. These pictures of David and the tree were taken on a day in late winter, 1977, before foliage appeared to further enhance the natural beauty of the secluded spot.



David Slasor, age nine, leans against the scraggly remains of the "old sycamore" in the Shades of Death. His great grandmother, Fannie Clark Campbell, also at the age of nine, swung from these limbs and carved her initials high above the ground. One can see at a glance the growth the old tree, now dead, has made in the intervening years. It would now require a ladder five times David's height to reach the lowest limb.



be to wander to the brush - shrouded fence rows to pick wild berries. One day Uncle Tom accidentally disturbed the nest of some disgruntled yellow jackets. The bees made it known in no uncertain terms that the boy had infringed upon private property.

Terrified, Uncle Tom ran screaming to the house, suffering from the wrath of at least one of the occupants of the nest. He found a haven under the front porch where he could nurse his "hurts" in privacy.

But he hadn't reckoned with the quick-thinking minds of his brother and sister. One peek under the porch triggered action.

"Oh, you look horrible!" Mom taunted the scared little boy as she hid a mischievous grin.

"Your head is really swelling up!" Uncle David, the seven-year-old added soberly as Uncle Tom's tears flowed more freely.

"It's getting bigger and bigger!" Mom gasped again in an attempt to hold back a chuckle.

It was no wonder Uncle Tom's mother, my grandmother, had trouble coaxing her youngest child out from under the porch to treat his bee stings, then to search for the two rascals who had scattered in opposite directions, and then to render them their just dues!

Such was a taste of country life in the valley known as the Shades of Death in the year 1910.

PART II

The Shades of Death! Such a forbidding name for one of nature's most beautiful spots! But the Shades of Death it is, and has been just that for at least the five generations I have been involved with during my lifetime.

Those of us who hear the phrase almost daily consider it as routine conversation. The mailman travels through every day of the year, and thinks nothing of it. The school bus schedule regularly lists the winding road as part of its route year after year. We who live adjacent to it include the term as a common by-word.

But to a stranger, perhaps a motorist who has become lost in the maze of country roads



This is a winter scene of a clearing in the Shades of Death. David Slasor at the age of nine watches Hollow Rock Run moving swiftly along as it has done throughout the ages. But the

house on the edge of its waters where his great grandmother, Fannie Clark Campbell, lived when she was David's age, has long since disappeared, except for a slight hollow in the ground.

that criss-cross nearby, the term is appalling.

"Now, you take the right-hand fork at the Ridge and go down through the Shades of Death..." and you needn't go any farther with your oral directions! The petrified stare he gives you lets you know he wouldn't believe another word! And he drives on to the next farmer who will probably give him the same story!

My maternal grandparents moved into the isolated area in March of 1910. With them came their family of five children: my mother, her two older brothers and the two younger ones. Mom vividly recalls the happy days they spent there among the trees as children. And as long as her brother, my Uncle David, was physically able to do so, he returned year

after year in the autumn to again stroll up the lonesome hollow by the creek and gaze at the golden sloping hillsides where he romped as a boy.

Many tales have been handed down through the generations concerning this dark vale situated in the southeastern section of Jefferson Township, in Washington County. These have included an assortment of yarns concerning the untimely demise of nameless individuals, which,

added to the natural darkness of the place, probably resulted in the unusual name.

Despite the variations of these stories, one thread of reflection remains constant - it was dark! And one strand of truth has been woven - it was beautiful! The latter statement still stands. The tall trees, the countless varieties of wildflowers, the winding road and the splashing stream with its waterfall, all combine to give it a rare natural beauty.

The darkness that probably contributed to its being termed "The Shades," has diminished considerably, with the harvesting many years ago of the stands of virgin timber. No longer is the foliage so interlaced that travelers on foot or on horseback must "hurry through," due to the extreme darkness even on bright sunny days.

The narrow road that leads from Bethel Methodist Church on the ridge to the west, to the site of the one-room Cole's Schoolhouse on the hilltop to the east, wends its way through the valley dominated by the bubbling Hollow Rock Run. It was in this valley that the great hemlocks grew, on either side of the winding road, and along the numerous small tributaries of the main stream that still hurries directly southward and empties into

Cross Creek on its journey to the Ohio River.

September of 1912 holds many memories for folks in the valley of Hollow Rock Run. That was the year the floods came to this particular section of the area, causing all streams to overflow their banks and bridges to be washed away.

The Shades of Death residents were no exception. Mom recalls that her mother and father herded all the kids up the hillside to safety as the waters of Hollow Rock Run continued to rise and lap away at their cellar door. The flood was widespread, affecting residents in communities along the Ohio River, causing the "flood of 1912" to go down in history.

As the water receded, my grandparents and their children again returned to their home, with no damage except the conventional fear of rising waters.

The next morning, Mrs. Ethelyn Scott Thompson, then a young school teacher who lived within sight of the Shades, between the two sharp bends in the road that led to Cole's School on the hill, was forced to detour. She recalls, "The bridge and the road were washed out. My father was going to take me the first day of my first term (of teaching) at the Lee's School. He went down to see if the bridge was gone. It was, and the road was impassable. He had to take me the other way, by Cole's School.

"When the matter of rebuilding the road came up, my father told them not to put it down in the hollow again, as it would probably get washed out again. He donated the south end of his field to keep it on higher ground."

Mrs. Thompson, who lives in Los Angeles, California, also recalls, "A family who lived nearby had an old horse that was blind. He had wandered out on the top of the waterfall and was standing there. Some sixth sense kept him from going over."

She also remembers the beauty of the spot, of reaching under the leaves to find the trailing arbutus in the spring, and picking the white trillium which still grows in abundance on the hillsides above the creek.

My mother also reminisces on the beautiful hillsides above and the valley below. "It was just beautiful" she recalls. "The woods were ripe with wild blackberries and raspberries, delicious wild red plums, and many varieties of other fruits."

She remembers that she and her two younger brothers would wander through the woods and to the fence rows to gather fruits and berries in season. They would carry them home and set their little table outdoors with the succulent fruit and eat their lunch under the huge trees.

Sometimes Grandma would supplement their supply with bread, butter, milk or other staples from the pantry.

Mom has told me many times of the day that they had prepared their lunch on the table, with all the food except the milk. As the three of them trudged down the path to the springhouse where the milk was kept fresh and cold, they left their table unguarded.

While they were gone, the hound dog, Sport, meandered his lazy way toward the table and looked it over. The only thing that apparently appealed to him was the small plate of butter. He promptly licked it clean!

"Sport ate the butter!" they all gasped on their return. And this phrase has become a favorite by-word of the family for these many years.

PART III

"When we lived at the Shades of Death. . . ." my mother has begun a sentence so many times throughout the years. I almost feel that I lived in this beautiful hollow myself, the valley that was dark in the daytime, due to the heavy growth of virgin timber that graced the hillsides and lowlands bordering Hollow Rock Run.

Most of Mom's reminiscences concern the childhood days that she and her brothers enjoyed in the beautiful outdoors. Both in summer and winter, beginning with the year 1910, they played among the huge evergreens that grew tall and graceful, and the fruit trees and wild vines that provided them with luscious food fit for the gods.

There is much more to the background of the Shades of Death, however, than happy childhood memories and the fact that the road was a dark path

under the pines that obscured the sunlight and cast dark shadows.

A number of prominent families other than my own grandparents have lived in the valley or the surrounding hillsides, and have raised their families, carving a living from the soil and the woods.

On the patent maps of Jefferson Township, this area was shown as the patent taken up by Elisha Robinson, under the name, "Remainder." It consisted of a little over 375 acres, the patent dated June 3, 1809.

This date was much later than for the surrounding tracts, most of which were settled before 1800, leading one to believe that this land might have been less desirable than that which surrounded it, and was a "remainder" after the more desirable land was patented.

In Crumrine's "History of Washington County," it is stated that Elisha Robinson had three sons: Elisha, Abel and Samuel. Elisha went to Virginia; Abel became a Methodist minister; and Samuel remained on the farm which was later sold to Robert Irwin. The elder Elisha Robinson was an active member of the Methodist Church and was among the 94 men who signed the subscription papers, a voluntary move for a building fund for the first house of worship at Bethel, overlooking the Shades of Death valley.

This was in the year 1813. The following year found the first Methodist Episcopal Chapel erected for the earliest religious body in Jefferson Township. Although it and three succeeding buildings on the site have witnessed countless drastic changes - remodelings, religious controversies, divisions, complete change-over of congregation and policy, fire, deterioration, crumbling and decay, and finally, suspension of services - the fourth structure yet stands proudly on the hilltop, pointing its spire skyward in silent tribute to dedicated men such as Elisha Robinson and his contemporaries.

On old maps of Jefferson Township, it is shown that the land "up the hollow" from where the road now crosses Hollow Rock Run at the Shades of Death, was divided into two farms. In walking upstream, a scar of a

lane still remains which led to the two farmhouses.

My grandparents and their family lived in the first house. By this time (1910) the house and all buildings except the barn of the second farm had disappeared. This was the Robert Irwin farm, and maps show that the property has also been owned by Gillespie and Cunningham families, all prominent in their time in the area.

By walking farther upstream, one comes to the farm now owned by Steve Bertovich and his family. It was up this hollow and the Bertovich lane that my mother and her brother struggled to the one-room Cole's School for their readin', 'ritin', and 'rithmetic. Nothing remains today of the old school except a cluster of bramble bushes to mark the spot.

In 1876 the Bertovich farm was the Hugh Patterson land, and in 1906, the Henry Cooper farm. The name, Louis Welker, is also associated with this farm, the two families having been related by marriage.

The descendants of these families have spread far and wide. In tracing the genealogical data on any one family, one automatically crosses the lines into the other families, as many a young man found his bride in the little lady on a neighboring farm.

Mom remembers many colorful incidents from her childhood spent in this valley. It was here that she stamped a letter for the first time, when she was sent by her mother to meet the mailman, the late Lawrence Meneely. It was along the banks of Hollow Rock Run that her mother raised turkeys, ducks and geese as a means of supplementing the meager income of my grandpap in assisting to pay the rent. It was from the old barn up the hollow on the Irwin place that she and her brothers fled from a nest of bumblebees. She remembers that one angry bee chased them all the way home, only to avenge the infringement on his privacy by stinging their mother, my grandmother!

She remembers the day that her grandfather, Joe Cassidy, was visiting the family, and was bragging at length about how

tasty his home-cured pork was. As the children were eating their lunch around the kitchen table, Grandpap continued to sing the praises of his smokehouse and its resulting delicacies.

My Uncle Tom, then five years old, peered across the table over his chicken leg and piped up, "Why didn't ya bring us a ham?"

PART IV

When Pappy and Davie and I ventured into the Shades of Death last spring, we followed a scar of a road that ran parallel to the stream known as Hollow Rock Run. And anyone who has studied any geometry at all knows that two lines running parallel to each other never meet. But these two did! The road and the creek!

I couldn't believe it! The road seemed to end right at the edge of the stream!

We waded through about three inches of water that flowed over the solid rock bed of the stream, and searched for the remainder of the road on the other side. But it was not until perhaps fifty feet farther upstream that the old road led off from the opposite side of Hollow Rock Run. This unusual find led to only one conclusion - at one time, the creek bed and the road bed were one and the same for this short distance! Wagons and buggies must have been pulled by horses along this bed of flat solid rock, the only difference being that of the flowing water underfoot!

Although I have talked with a number of oldtimers whose memories take them back to the days when the Shades of Death was alive with children and barnyards full of ducks and chickens, someone has yet to remember exactly why the area was given this eerie name. Several said it was due only to the heavy growth of evergreens overhanging the road, causing even daylight to be dark. Others would tell me that "there are stories that the place was haunted!"

"Of course it was haunted!" my mother assured me. "A shadow followed Grandma across the creek one night!"

As Mom was only nine years old when she moved there, her memory of the terrifying incident is rather vague. In fact, that's all she remembers about it, as no explanation was ever

found as to what had scared her mother that night in the year 1910.

Mrs. Ethelyn Scott Thompson, of Los Angeles, recalls the spine tingling story of the man who was "groping his way through the dark night and fell over a log. His right hand encountered the body of a dead man!"

Mrs. Thompson was a young school teacher at the time, and lived part way up the hill above the dark and dreaded Shades.

Other vague references have been, "Oh, I've heard there was a man killed there one time!" And, "A man was found hanging from a tree there once!" And many others just as gruesome have come to my attention. But the individuals are nameless, and no facts can substantiate any of the stories. Thus with tales such as these being handed down through the generations, it is little wonder the name, "Shades of Death" evolved!

Mom remembers several of the neighbors who lived along the Shades of Death road during the years following 1910. Their houses are now gone, and little is known of the families who occupied them.

In one of the houses lived a Negro couple, Tom and Elizabeth Bane. This house stood where Emil Shimko now lives, almost within sight of Bethel Church. Mr. Bane was janitor at the church for many years and always attended its services. "No finer man ever lived!" is the reputation he left behind.

Another Negro couple was Billy Newman and his wife. Their house was later occupied by the Jim Grimm family. A lone scraggly pine tree marks the spot on a bend in the road where these families made their home.

Billy Newman raised cane and made molasses. He always shared his product with Mom's family, and Mom remembers that it was very strong of taste. "We called it black-strap molasses," she recalls. Billy had a crippled boy, Emmett, who attended Cole's School on the hill with the other children of the Shades of Death.

Jim Grimm moved his large family into the house after the Newmans moved out. Mr. Grimm was a trapper, fur trader and buyer, coal miner, honey-dipper and worked at a number of other

handy jobs. He and his wife also took in boarders.

"Got any skunk hides?" was one of his favorite cries when he met a neighbor along the road.

The family lost a boy while living there, who is buried in the Bethel graveyard. Neighbors recall the extremely poor conditions of the road at that time, as they attempted to attend the young man's funeral. The house is now gone and the family is scattered.

The Sutherland family has always been very prominent in the area, various generations living at several nearby locations at different times. This family has a most interesting "family tree," one that has branched out in many directions into countless walks of life. A more staunch and influential family would indeed be difficult to find.

Their story began in this country with John Sutherland, a native of Scotland, and a brave soldier of the American Revolution. He died on January 2, 1842 at the age of 90, and is buried in the Cross Creek graveyard. His wife was Susannah Norris, who preceded him in death in 1833. The grandchildren of their grandchildren are today's generation of Sutherland grandparents, the family still reaching out and exerting their influence for good in their chosen fields.

One grandson alone, John W. Sutherland, was the father of twelve children. As each married, the family connections brought in other names that are still well known in the Jefferson Township area today. Included are the names of Cassidy, Barnes, Scott, Megahan, Irwin, Hanlin, Pettibon, Cunningham, Melvin, Truax and many others.

The remains of the older generations of these families rest in the Bethel graveyard, surrounding the church that they helped to build, and overlooking the Shades of Death area where many of them were born and carved out their living.

PART V

It has been said that the more a person learns about a subject, the more he discovers that they yet to learn about it. I have

found this extremely true in my research on the area in Jefferson Township known as the Shades of Death.

When I began this series, I had planned only to tell a few of the amusing escapades of my mother and her brothers as they romped over the steep hillsides and wandered through the valley as small children. I had intended to merely touch on the location, the topography and the families who lived in the immediate area, as well as name those who originally settled in the deep dark shadows of the huge hemlock trees that grew there in such abundance.

But the farther I search for material, the more widespread my story becomes, engulfing the very lives of prominent families whose descendants are still very much intertwined both with each other and with present-day life.

I have discovered interesting facts about both my own ancestors and the ancestors of those who live around me. I have been made aware of the fact that most of the young folks whose parents settled in these parts more than a century and a half ago eventually married the young folks of another family who did likewise, and that most of our names are somehow dangling from the same family tree!

When William Wallace Sutherland (Bill), Sr., cut down the first virgin hemlock in the Shades of Death shortly after 1910, and ran it through his sawmill, how could he know that one of the young men who drove a team of horses to pull in the logs, and another who assisted him on the mill, would eventually become my two grandfathers?

Earl W. Campbell and David S. Clark had never met before, and their children, my parents, were not destined to meet for another decade. But here am I, recording the whims of fate!

Just last week I talked to another William Wallace Sutherland (Bud), Jr., who is following in the footsteps of his father, in the lumber business. Bud operates the largest of the area's remaining sawmills, occupying 23 acres, in Burgettstown. As keenly interested in the Sutherland genealogical line as he is in the present and future of his seven children, Bud has been extremely helpful to me in

providing pictures, figures and facts concerning this present series on the Shades of Death.

Like his father before him, wood is his business. He knows that a healthy tree should grow at the rate of 15 percent per year, and that when the rate of growth slows down, it should be cut to give the young trees around it a chance to grow, maintaining the annual growth rate in our forests.

He also knows that his grandfather once lived in a house now quite dilapidated by the ravages of time, adjoining where I live today. And he has recorded the fact that his father was born in a house that no longer exists, near a race track of which only a scar remains, on the Albert Miller farm.

Another "Sutherland connection" who supplied me with a picture of her ancestors, is Jean Irwin Lewis, of Cleveland, Ohio. Jean's mother was Anna Sutherland Irwin, a sister of Bud's father. And since Jean's father, Robert Irwin, was actually born in one of the farmhouses that once existed in the Shades of Death, a common thread seems to be woven among all of the families who settled in the area in the beginning.

Jean says that she remembers her father telling about getting out of bed on winter mornings in that old log house, and making tracks in the snow to get to the kitchen. This was the house where only the barn remained of the buildings in the year 1910, where my mother and her brothers were chased out by a nest of angry bees!

By this time, the Irwin "children" were passing the middle age span in their lives. Each was, as could be described in today's lingo, "doing his thing." Mom remembers that Robert's sisters, Anna and Jessie, baked and sold delicious loaves of home-made bread from their home in Eldersville. Theirs was a cozy little house on what is now a vacant lot adjacent to Helen and Gaylord Martin.

Robert, Anna and Jessie and their brothers and sisters spent eight years in the old log house in the Shades of Death, later moving to "the Sutherland farm" just over the hill to the east. The Sutherland farm was later

occupied by George Sutherland, Bud's uncle, who farmed there. My mother's father worked on the farm for him. One of George's daughters, Myrtle Sutherland

Lantz, of Follansbee, became Mom's first school teacher.

Other help in reminiscences came from Ethelyn Scott Thompson, of Los Angeles, who recalls many vivid memories of her young life spent on the hillside overlooking the Shades of Death. One "landmark" she recalls is the beautiful waterfall on Hollow Rock Run, just below the house where she lived. "It was just a trickle in the dry months," she writes. But last week when I went to the spot to take a picture of it, only the overhanging rocks were in evidence. The unusual dry spell of recent weeks had reduced it to less than a trickle. No water at all ran over the falls, where in the spring, it is a sight to behold.

Thus the cycle continues, the lives of families being intertwined through many generations, family trees embracing each other in fond and cherished memories. Whether it was a Sutherland who eyed the huge hemlocks for future use as a finished product, or a Scott who sang in the old Bethel Church choir, an Irwin who tracked snow into the kitchen from the bedroom on a frigid morning, or a Clark who galloped among the trees on beanpole "horses," all have a common bond. The countless treasures that remain in the haunts of the minds of unnumbered individuals are priceless to those who hold them. The beginning of life for all of them was in this mystical seldom seen valley known as the Shades of Death!

Editor's Note: Since this article was written more than twenty years ago, many of the folks mentioned have passed away. Due to lack of time, it is not being re-written at this time to place them in the past tense.



This is a picture of the Lewis Irwin family, several of whom were born at the Shades of Death. The picture was taken on the front porch of the house joining the Bethel Church grounds, now occupied by the Nick Bertovich family. The picture was probably taken before 1900.

Left to right standing: Jessie, Robert, Anna, Ida and James.

Seated, center, Lewis Irwin and his wife.

Front, seated, youngest son, Bert. All are deceased.

Mr. and Mrs. Lewis Irwin were Grandpa and Grandma to Merle Irwin, a resident of the Weirton Convalescent Home, and Jean Irwin Lewis, of Cleveland. Both were formerly from Eldersville.

At the time this picture was taken, the Irwins had moved from the Shades of Death and were renting this farm from the Cole family.



The twelve children of John Walker Sutherland, along with their wives, husbands and children, gathered around him for a family picture taken in the year 1896. With Mr. Sutherland is his second wife, Cynthia Hanlin Sutherland. His first wife, Eleanor Virtue Sutherland, the mother

of six of the children, two boys and four girls, had passed away 26 years before this picture was taken, at the age of 33 years.

Cynthia's children, three girls and three boys, were as yet quite young and unmarried at this time.