

Sensebach Heritage

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The Life of Reverend Oscar Fitzgerald Sensabaugh, continued

Recollections of a Western Circuit Rider, Back East

by Reverend Oscar Fitzgerald Sensabaugh

We pick up Oscar's story as he receives his first pastoral charge in eastern Tennessee in 1878. He was 19 years old at the time and newly married to Miss Eugenia Caroline Faucette.

I was sent to the Crossville Mission, Sequatche District, with George Renfro as presiding elder. As soon as I could make all arrangements, my wife and I were on our way to "our first appointment" on Cumberland Mountain.

We stopped with a fine family in the bounds of our charge and remained until Monday morning. Instructions were given as to how to reach Grassy Cove which was to be headquarters of the work. We stopped at the foot of the mountain in Grassy Cove and remained for several days with a hospitable family. After making a canvass to secure a place for the pastor and wife, the only available place found was a 12 X 20 foot leanto on the west side of the Straten Inn. It was comfortable with a bed, a small heater and a good cook stove. The family occupying the Inn at the time was a fine Methodist family. On January 29, 1879, our oldest son, Leonidas Franklin, was born.

On the circuit there were several locations, often a schoolhouse, that Oscar would visit and hold church services. He describes each of the major stations on his circuit, such as the John Henry School House. Here Oscar provides a peek into the accommodations of a preacher on the circuit.

My first visit to this school house was on a Saturday afternoon. The whole top of the mountain was covered with snow. I arrived just a short time before sundown. I rode up to a boy about twelve who was cutting wood. I spoke and he asked, "Is you Uncle Sensabaugh, our new preacher?" I replied, "Yes, but I'm not your uncle." He said, "That is what we call our preacher. Get down and I will take your horse and

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Background on Recollections

Back in 1997, in volume 2, number 3 of this newsletter, we published excerpts from *Recollections*, the memoirs of Reverend Oscar Fitzgerald Sensabaugh. These memoirs, based on the manuscript originally set down by Oscar in 1954, were redacted by his grandson, Dr. George F. Sensabaugh of Palo Alto. George, who recently passed away at the age of 95, reorganized Oscar's manuscript, provided historical context, added transitions, and changed perspective to third person. In 1997 we reprinted excerpts from this redacted version, focusing on Oscar's years riding circuit on the western frontier of Colorado. Left untold was the story of Oscar's early circuit riding in the mountains of postbellum North Carolina and Tennessee.

In this issue we focus on Oscar's early years as a newly licensed preacher in the Great Smoky Mountains on the North Carolina - Tennessee border. He was first licensed to preach in 1877 in the Southern Methodist Church. His mother and father had both died while he was young (see "Ten Years in A Family", *Sensebach Heritage*, vol. 4, no. 4). The Civil War was not long past, and this circuit took him through the Great Smoky Mountains where illegal moonshining was a way of life. In this issue we focus on the first two years of Oscar's ministry. The story is told in Oscar's own words, recalling several specific incidents that illustrate life as a circuit rider in that era. A few brief segues have been included in italics to help the flow of the story. ☼



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