

THE BILLIE BUSSEY INTERVIEW



BILLIE BUSSEY OUTSIDE HER HOME

Billie Bussey's account of the great Stuarts Draft bank robbery was exciting and had me on the edge of my seat the whole time she was telling it. And Billie herself is no less exciting! A big dynamo packaged in a small frame could correctly describe her manner.

Born and raised in the big white family home on Flory Avenue, Billie has led the kind of life that young girls still dream of. Born the last child of William and Mary Bussey, Billie got her unique name when, after being dubbed Mary Louise and Mildred Louise, nothing "stuck". Finally when she was about six years old, her Daddy who was disappointed that he didn't have a boy to pass on the family name to, decided to rename her Willie Thomas after both he and his wife's favorite brothers. This name "stuck" and soon the nickname Billie came into being. "But my daddy always called

me Baby, right up til the time I was grown", Billie laughed.

Her two older sisters, Helen & Alice were gifted children with a multitude of talents including oil painting and writing stories and poetry. They passed their knowledge on to young Billie and the Bussey home was alive with the varied activities of the three sisters.

Billie recalls the early days in Stuarts Draft with fond remembrances. "There was no industry here then, just a few businesses on Main Street. The rest of the outlying land was the most beautiful rich farm land you could imagine. My parents bought our home in 1907 from the Smiths, who ran a store here then. Back then Flory Avenue was a sight to behold. There were trees and beautiful flowers planted everywhere. We had a neat white picket fence all around our house just as it is today and all the neighbors took a great deal of pride in the way their homes looked. We all enjoyed the beautiful view of the Blue Ridge Mountains outside our windows. We got our water from mountain springs which was piped down to our home. That was the sweetest water you ever tasted! There was an old-fashioned bridge across the South River with a footpath that ran along beside it. Oh, the wonderful walks we'd take in the evenings! There were Osage Orange trees growing alongside the road and they made the air sweet with their perfume. Everyone drove a buggy then instead of cars and everyone seemed to be in less of a hurry. The town was made up of such businesses as Hughes' General Store, The Stuarts Draft Milling Company, Cohrons Feed and Hay, Mr. Kube's blacksmith shop, and so many others. Oh, the memories they bring back. Good memories. I can still hear the sound of those huge steam engines roaring through town at night. The sound didn't bother us at all! And it brings back a certain nostalgia that the diesel engines of today can't match. We'd walk along the railroad tracks and pick wild asparagus and pails of wild strawberries. The cinders from the train made the soil rich there

cont. next page

Billie Bussey cont.

and the strawberries grew so big! We'd take them home to Mama and she'd make a mouth-watering shortcake for that night's dessert. She'd top it all off with a mound of fresh whipped cream and we'd all be in heaven!"

Billie grew up and was very popular with everyone in Stuarts Draft. So much so, that when she was 17 years old the town merchants put on a popularity contest with the townspeople casting votes for their favorite girl. Billie won that contest and became Miss Augusta County that year. She, along with two other girls from different cities in Virginia won an all expenses paid trip to New York and Bermuda. "We had such a lovely time going on our trip...so many new sights to see and things to do," recalls Billie. When she returned home she enrolled in Mary Baldwin College and studied business. Then she came home to Stuarts Draft and worked in the bank. She loved her home so much that she decided not to marry but to live at home with her parents. She did so until they both passed away and now she lives there all by herself and has become, in her own words, "man about the house". She does all her own house upkeep, gardening and mowing around the spacious grounds of the stately home. She's a warm and witty and completely independent soul who comes and goes whenever she wants. She's content to stay home and be around the family memories that surround her. In one room her parents wedding picture hangs on the wall, in another, her sister's oil paintings decorate the house. Childhood dolls of all kinds must bring back alot of memories whenever she glances at them.

The whole house is warm and inviting, just as Billie is and a real joy to be in! Thanks Billie for sharing your home and memories of Stuarts Draft with me!

Lynn Barrett