

## 'Treat Everybody Right And Serve the Lord'

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Through one window of her sitting-room, Mrs. Amanda Frances Ross frequently gazes across the fields and Silver Creek to the site of her birth 102 years ago in Clark County.

Through another window she looks out on a small family cemetery – perhaps 100 feet away – where she says she may be buried. This is a Ross family burial plot. Some of her husband's kin are buried there. Only a few miles away is another Ross family cemetery, where her husband is buried. But, she said, that one is filled. Mrs. Ross lay down her Bible and gazed across the fields.

"If it weren't for the trees I could see the ground where the old log house used to stand," she said. "It has been gone for years. I think it burned."

Mrs. Ross, probably the oldest resident of Floyd County, lives in a small rented house on the Payne-Koehler Road, near New Albany. She has spent most of her life in Floyd County, and her entire life within a radius of a few miles.

Father Was A Slave. Her father, Thomas Henson, born a slave in Kentucky, moved his family to Indiana into the two-story log house where Mrs. Ross was born on Valentine Day, 1868. Andrew Johnson was president.

She was a young girl when the family left the log house and settled on a farm near the County Line Road in Floyd County. There were nine children in the family – seven "whole" as she expressed it, and two stepchildren.

"Only my baby brother (John Henson, Indianapolis) is left besides me, and he's up in his 80s. I often wonder if he's going to leave me here," she said, a note of resignation in her voice.

Her father's farm lay next to the Ross farm, and it was along the fence line that her courtship with Harry Ross began. She was attending old Jacobs Chapel School.

"My father wanted me to be a schoolteacher, but my mother put me to work around the house after common school, and so I just got married," she said, smiling. She said she was 14 or 15 when she married. Her husband, she said, claimed he was 21. But she said she didn't know.

They established their own home near the county line. One child was born of the marriage – a daughter, Edith lola Ross, who died in infancy.

When her husband died years ago, Mrs. Ross disposed of her home and moved in with her brother, the late Robert Henson, in the house in which she now lives. When her brother died, she stayed on.

Mrs. Ross spends her days mostly with her memories and her Bible and, as she puts it, "piddling around the house." She does her own washing, ironing and cooking, and confided, with a chuckle, she sticks with the old ways.

For example, she does her washing in a tub on an old-fashioned washboard, even though she has a new electric washer. It might as well have remained in the shipping carton. She has never used it. Likewise, she said a handsome punch bowl and cups providing the centerpiece for an aged buffet are gathering dust. They were a gift to her. She said she'd never had an occasion to use them.

Kerosene Lamp Is Used. The house is heated by coal and wood stoves, and a kerosene lamp lends a generations-old air to the kitchen table. She is sparing about electricity. She says her small welfare check doesn't stretch far.

"But the Lord has been good to me," she said. She reads her bible without glasses, and still has most of her own teeth. Her hearing is slightly impaired, but she said she has enjoyed good health since childhood. "Nothing hurts me at all."

But she has no formula for a long life. "No, I don't give it much thought," she said. "You're what you are. Just treat everybody right and serve the Lord – that's the main thing – and do what he asks. You'll get along all right."

Her World Is Small. She has few observations to offer on what goes on beyond her small world. "Lots of people worry about the war, but I don't like worrying much. What's going to be is to be," she said, gazing out the window.

Mrs. Ross said she has no thoughts or opinions on the racial problems. "I've always been treated well by both the white and the black races."

After 102 years, the only things she owns are the meager possessions in her home. Even the house, which belonged to her brother, is owned by someone else. She said her brother offered it to her before his death, but she didn't want it.

She sat down with her Bible again and patted it. "Just do what the Lord asks you to do," she repeated.

Mrs. Ross seldom misses church at Howard Chapel in New Albany, although she has to depend on others for transportation. It disturbed her that she had missed a recent Sunday because she had no way to get there.

I had noted a rifle shell on an ash tray I had been using, and a rifle leaning against the wall at the front door. I asked her if the shell was alive. She said it was very much alive. "And I can handle that, too," she chuckled, pointing to the rifle. "That's there for my protection." "Have you ever used it?" I asked. "No, not yet," she replied.