

# Biography from Civil War era fascinating story

By DOROTHY HAMILL

A Union sympathizer forced into the Southern army.

That was the predicament of an area resident during those days when the Civil War divided Tennessee.

He even had the misfortune to spend time in a Northern prison.

His name was Dr. A.S.N. Dobson, and in his adult life he lived in a beautiful old white frame house, with its accompanying farm, located on Rt. 2, Limestone, in a section known then as Broylesville.

To the delight of later generations, Dr. Dobson, in his final years, wrote up his "biography," which was assembled and typed by a son, Roy Calvin Dobson.

The old homeplace at Broylesville is still there, enlarged and remodeled but with the older parts intact.

Present day occupants are Mr. and Mrs. Kyle McQueen, who bought the home and land in 1947 from Joe Meredith. The McQueens had moved here when their former home in Butler was transplanted, and now they have a Grade A Dairy Farm, with 67 milk cows, and about 150 animals counting beef and calves.

During their occupancy, old-time residents near by have pointed out to Mrs. McQueen the original parts of the house, as they remembered them, and in addition, descendants of Dr. Dobson have called to see again the home of their ancestor.

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His class of six had their orations prepared for commencement in June, but by the last of April, war excitement was running high and President Lincoln had made his first call for 75,000 volunteers to put down the rebellion. Tennessee had not then voted on secession, and much of East Tennessee was for the Union, though many others favored the Southern cause.

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father was Revenue Collector for Greene County and in the summer made his son a deputy, and consequently he was exempted from military duty. Family and relatives were all Union people.

As for the young Dobson, he had a further exemption, for he began teaching school at Mt. Bethel Church near "Limestone Town," but he became sick with fever and had to stop. He even didn't get to call on his "best girl," Nannie Jane McGaughey — later his wife.

Dobson's older brother, John, had already gone to Indiana to join the Union Army. Now it seemed that Newton must either do likewise or become conscripted. Soon, disregarding his exemptions, some neighbor boys, Confederates, conscripted him and gave him 30 minutes to get ready to leave.

Dobson tried to go out back and run, but was too weak from the fever. He was taken under guard and was shipped by train to a Confederate Army instruction camp in Knoxville.

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That was in March of 1863, and he was sent to a camp in Cumberland Gap. The other soldiers, he observed, liked to drink, play cards and swear. But Newton Dobson had been brought up with strong religious feeling, and would take part in none of these activities. Instead, once the officers saw his handwriting, he was detailed to remain in mess and keep the company records.

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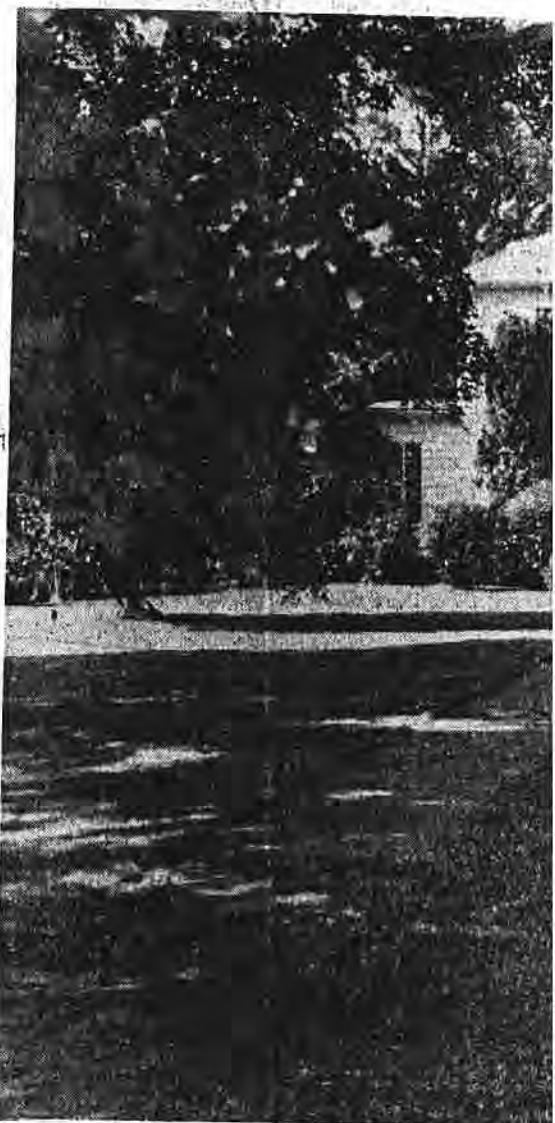
Around September, Gen. Burnside came through, took Knoxville, and sent a detachment back for the men at Cumberland Gap. Some of the Federal troops were neighbors of the Dobson family, and offered to take Newton to camp and explain why he was in the Southern Army and help him go home. Once more, he refused to go against his word. So he became a prisoner at Camp Douglass on the shore of Lake Michigan. On the way, someone stole his knapsack with all his clothes, leaving him only with an old coat, no vest, a striped home-made cotton shirt and a pair of pants. No blanket, no hat, and treasured letters gone. He had only five dollars in money and no communication with his home folks.

In camp, he was again assigned to make out reports, but he often had to wade through water to deliver them and it was getting cold. He learned of a lady in Chicago who helped prisoners and wrote her, and she sent him clothing.

Prison life, he noted, was hard. They had rations, but no way to cook them — no stove and few vessels and about fourth of a cord of wood to cook for 120 men. A mess of five would only get one or two sticks of wood to cook three days' rations. Sewage was bad and many fell ill and died.

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The war was still raging and Dobson could not get home, so he remained with the Gibsons, finding a school to teach for one year. Then he was out of employment, but Dr. Gibson persuaded him to study medicine, which he did, beginning in 1864, learning from the older man.

He had accepted a teaching position in Moscow, Ohio, but continued to read medicine. Late in that year his "best girl," Nannie, whom, he reveals, he had loved since he was six years old, managed to get north and they were married, both teaching school for a while.

In 1866, they returned to Tennessee, and, through Dobson's old teacher, Dr. Rankin, then pastor of Salem Church at Washington College, located in Broylesville. The neighborhood needed a doctor, so they bought the farm from an Ira Green, with the house that had already been built for 40 or 50 years. It was in bad condition, but the young couple had saved some money and could restore it. They also developed the farm and were active in church — for always the Dobsons were dedicated Presbyterian worshippers.

The house that he occupied for so long has yet the strap hinges on all doors, the kind generally made by a blacksmith. They have old-time porcelain knobs with a skeleton key to open the iron locks.

The stairway is original and so are many of the fireplaces, as well as the wainscoting on the walls, about 30 inches from the floor. Mrs. McQueen was told that Dr. Dobson had his office on a second-floor front room, so his patients had to climb the stairs to consult him. In one room downstairs is a built-in glass-fronted row of shelves in which, Mrs. McQueen learned, Mrs. Dobson used to keep her sewing materials.

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Staff Photos by Eddie LeSueur

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