

## **An Ordinary Woman: Sarah A. Geer McIntyre of Saltville, Virginia**

**Zola Troutman Noble**

The history of southwest Virginia was determined not only by prominent families with such names as Preston, Floyd, Patton, Stuart, and Henry, but also by countless families known only to their neighbors in the small communities in which they resided, communities tucked into valleys or gaps between mountains or alongside tumbling creeks or river banks. Telling their stories enriches the landscape just as details enrich paintings by the great masters.

Particularly the stories of women are often overshadowed by those of men who made names for themselves. Yet the quiet or not-so-quiet lives of women provided the foundation upon which the men built their reputations. Single women often left their mark as well. The life of a woman in one family can offer insight into the fabric of life in Southwest Virginia. From the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, letters and family stories regarding the life of Sarah A. Geer McIntyre (1860–1928) reveal intriguing facts about her, about those who influenced her life, and about those who felt her influence. These letters and stories give her life a place of interest in the history of southwest Virginia.

Sarah A. Geer<sup>1</sup> was born on January 4, 1860,<sup>2</sup> in Smyth County, Virginia, to Margaret Moore Geer (1838–1860), daughter of Samuel and Elizabeth Moore, and William E. Geer (1830–1913).<sup>3</sup> Though the couple had been married five years, Sarah was their first child.<sup>4</sup> The couple's joy at Sarah's birth turned much too soon to sorrow, for Margaret died just eight days later of "child bed fever."<sup>5</sup> The early loss of her mother was the first in a number of unfortunate events Sarah would face throughout her life.

Four months after her birth, the 1860 census of Smyth County, Virginia, taken in April, reveals that Sarah Ann Geer lived at Seven

Mile Ford with her father, William E. Geer, a wagoner, and with her grandmother, Celia Geer, age 57. They lived in the home of William's sister, Leah Geer McLure, and her family. The census shows that William owned no real estate, so it seems that Sarah was born into a family of meager means.

Sarah's grandmother Celia was herself a single mother. Whether she was widowed or not is a mystery, as is the identity of her children's father. Celia is listed in the 1850 census of Washington County, Virginia, as head of household, a farmer, living with two sons named William and Thomas. Perhaps some of Celia's resourcefulness in the face of difficult circumstances was passed on to her granddaughter, Sarah.

On June 20, 1861,<sup>6</sup> when Sarah was eighteen months old, her father traveled to Abingdon, Virginia, with his brother-in-law, Theophilus Moore,<sup>7</sup> and signed with the 48th Virginia Infantry, Confederate States of America. In 1863 he was captured on the retreat from Gettysburg and imprisoned at Fort Delaware Prison on Pea Patch Island, Delaware. After ten weeks, William signed the "yellow dog contract," as the Rebels called the oath of allegiance, and he was assigned to the United States Army's 1st Regiment Connecticut Cavalry,<sup>8</sup> Company G.<sup>9</sup> When the war ended, William's mother wrote to him that it was unsafe for him to return home.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, when he was mustered out of the service in Minnesota where he was stationed in October 1865, William stayed in the North, eventually making his home in Maiden Rock, Wisconsin.<sup>11</sup>

Back home in Smyth County during the war, Celia took care of little Sarah. Family tradition suggests that Margaret Moore Geer's sister, Hannah Moore Allison, wife of John P. Allison, Confederate veteran and farmer, also contributed to Sarah's upbringing. During the war, Smyth County endured two battles, one at Saltville (1864), resulting in the destruction of the salt works, and another at Marion. How these events affected Sarah and her family can only be imagined. Although specific events of Sarah's childhood are unknown, it is easy to surmise that there were difficulties for a little girl whose father was considered by many to be a traitor.<sup>12</sup>

Little is known of Sarah's life between the end of the Civil War and her marriage to Martin McIntyre in 1897. Family tradition says that her dark complexion earned her the nickname "little black Sally,"

and she was said to be “black Dutch,” a term commonly applied to Melungeons, a group of people of mixed ethnic ancestry first noted living in northeastern Tennessee and southwestern Virginia.<sup>13</sup> At this writing, however, there is no proof of Melungeon ancestry.

There is no uncertainty, however, that Sarah’s lifelong best friend was Sarah Alice (“Allie”) Rumbley. Allie’s pale blue eyes, blonde hair, fair skin, and round face contrasted sharply with Sarah’s brown eyes, black hair, dark skin, and bird-like features. Sarah and Allie reportedly met while they worked at the Palmer Inn in Saltville, where Sarah was the cook and Allie was the housekeeper.<sup>14</sup> Earliest written evidence suggests that their friendship began possibly before 1888. A note in a small account book written by Allie in her even and carefully slanted script describes important events in their lives:

Sarah Alice Rumbley was borned June 6, 1858 was convicted of sin Feb 14 1877. Sunday the 18, candidate for membership. May Thursday 2nd 1878 professed faith in Christ. First prayer in public July Thursday 25 1878 amersed september Thirsay 6 1883.

Sarah A. Geer convicted November 21 1888 converted the 22nd and received in the church.<sup>15</sup>

Another page identifies the church as Methodist.

After Allie “professed faith in Christ,” and before her first public prayer, she wrote the following letter to an “Absent Friend” entreating that person’s prayers for her:

By the request of a friend  
Woodland, Virginia  
July 7th, 1877

My Absent Friend

I hardly know how to address you, as I have never bin blessed with an oppertunity of forming your acquaintance, but by the halls of God’s Spirit, and the influence of your earnest prayer I will endever to address you in the best way and manner that I know how. In the first place I must confess how greatly your request surprised me; and at the same time I thank God for ever giving me such a friend here in this selfish world to take such a deep interest in my soul’s eternal welfare. O, that true Christians would a wake to the deathless interest of poor perishing sinners; ever remembering that he that converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a

multitude of sins. My friend don't think me presumptuous or unkind when I endeavor to impress upon your mind the request of an increased interest in your prayers, for freely you have received and freely give.

Oh, pray earnestly till I have received that good potion which can never be taken from me. I do thank God for the impression that secret prayer has made on my heart, for often I feel happiness unspeakable.

Excuse me if I have bin two plain, for thoughts welcome to my bosome, may make yours bleed. My friend you will do me a great favor by keeping those few illcomposed lines in secret — let them be as though they had never bin written, and as if the occasion for them had never arisen.

To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.

I remain most affectionately and respectfully yours,

Sarah A.

Remember that there is Joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth; more then over ninety and nine Just persons which need no repentance. Oh, Lord, help us to stay our trust on thee, the neglected source of all goodness, and enable us to endure temptations, for when we are tried we shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.

Perhaps he will admit your prayer  
And lend a listening ear to your entreaties.<sup>16</sup>

Both Allie and Sarah could have signed a letter Sarah A., but the handwriting is Allie's uniformly slanted script. By contrast, Sarah's handwriting looks haphazard, angling this way and that, like a river meandering through the countryside.

Allie's letter reveals the religious language commonly used by Protestants during that day, phrases such as "my soul's eternal welfare" and "wake to the deathless interest of poor perishing sinners." Her words are elegant and passionate: "I do thank God for the impression that secret prayer has made on my heart, for often I feel happiness unspeakable." Also her elaborate ending of quoted scripture makes one wonder who has requested prayer from whom, yet she closes with an entreaty for God to answer her absent friend's prayers for her

soul's salvation. This letter reveals a passion for God that continued with Allie and Sarah throughout their lives, a passion they passed on to Sarah's child, stepchildren, nieces, and grandchildren.

Other than her conversion at age 28, no record exists of Sarah's activities for another nine years. In 1897, at age 37, Sarah would have been labeled a spinster when she was married on June 16, 1897<sup>17</sup> to Martin McIntyre, a laborer and widower with four children. Allie Rumbley and Sarah's cousin Rachel Allison, daughter of Hannah and John Allison, witnessed the marriage.<sup>18</sup> Martin's first wife, Susan (Chapman) McIntyre, had died the previous summer (July 13, 1896).<sup>19</sup> Whether Sarah was acquainted with the McIntyre family before Susan's death is unknown. The marriage may have been one of convenience for Martin, who surely needed a cook and housekeeper and someone to look after his children: Katie (16), Stephen (14), Gould (12), and Elizabeth, or Lizzie (7).<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, Martin's daughter Katie was old enough to step in as cook and housekeeper, so his marriage to Sarah may have been a love match. Existing evidence does not answer this question.

Whatever the case, tragedy struck after less than eight weeks when Martin suffered a sudden heart attack and died on August 7, 1897, as he was splitting wood.<sup>21</sup> Suddenly, Sarah was left a widow with four stepchildren in her care, and she was pregnant. At Martin's death, Sarah's friend Allie immediately came to her aid. Eight and a half months after Martin died, Sarah gave birth to a son on April 30, 1898. She named the child John Martin and called him Martie. By the time the 1900 census was taken, Allie Rumbley was living with Sarah,<sup>22</sup> and the children were scattered, as often happened with the death of parents. Gould lived in Kentucky,<sup>23</sup> Lizzie lived with Sarah and Allie,<sup>24</sup> and the whereabouts of Kate and Stephen are unknown.<sup>25</sup> Allie and Sarah supported their family by their work as cook and housekeeper at the Palmer Inn.

About 1905, M. P. Rimmer, a Church of God preacher from Norton, Virginia, went to Allison Gap and held a revival. Influenced by Rimmer's sermons and those of other evangelists, such as A. G. Riddle of Atkins, Virginia, and W. P. Long and W. A. Sutherland, both of Greenville, Tennessee,<sup>26</sup> Sarah and Allie left the Methodist Church and became followers of the Church of God movement.<sup>27</sup>

Through this association, Sarah and Allie would later play a part in establishing a church in Allison Gap. A photograph taken about 1910 shows Sarah being baptized by W. P. Long.<sup>28</sup>

Meanwhile, from 1865 until his death in 1913, Sarah's father, William E. Geer, made a life for himself in Wisconsin. On April 26, 1868, he married Julia Trumbull, the foster daughter of Maiden Rock's founder and leading citizen, John D. Trumbull, and his wife, Betsy Lyon Trumbull. Julia was 18 years old at the time of her marriage to William, who was 38. They had no children.

If William ever considered returning to Virginia, he must have pushed the idea further and further back in his mind as the years passed. Did he receive an occasional letter from his mother with word about Sarah? Was he plagued by feelings of guilt for not returning to see them? Did Sarah feel abandoned by him? Did the pain of his mother's letter telling him not to come home continue to trouble him? He left no record to answer these questions.

Evidence from the *Maiden Rock Press* indicates that William's life in this tiny village on a bluff above Lake Pepin was busy and full. For a time, he apparently operated a restaurant and saloon. When he sold his business, the *Pierce County (Wisconsin) Herald* ran this notice on March 29, 1877:

Religion, since the decision of the Commission, seems to occupy a permanent place in the thoughts of the sedate people of the "Rock." Mr. Wm. Geer, who has been keeping a restaurant and saloon in the village, experienced a change of heart and immediately sold out. Ed Eldridge will fill the vacancy.<sup>29</sup>

Some time later, William began delivering mail. His mail runs took him from Maiden Rock to six other towns in the area around Lake Pepin. After William had carried the mail for ten years, he calculated his total miles traveled. He gave these figures to the *Maiden Rock Press*:

The following is the distance traveled by our mail carrier, Mr. W. E. Geer, in a period of ten years: From Maiden Rock to River Falls, in three years, 9,984 miles; from Red Wing to Reed's Landing, in three years, 12,480 miles; from Maiden rock to Rock Elm in one year, 1,664 miles; from Maiden Rock to Lake City in three years, 7,488 miles; from Maiden Rock to Frontenac, 730 miles; from Maiden Rock to Ellsworth in three years and three months,



The baptism of Sarah McIntyre. On the back of the photo, Sarah's son J. M. "Martie" McIntyre wrote the following: "Baptism service in creek at the Mitchell home across from Chas. Barbrow's home, about 1910. W. P. Long coming out of the water with Mrs. Sarah McIntyre."

7,006 miles; from Maiden Rock to Hersey in three years and four months, 18,712 miles; making a total of 65,542 miles travel in ten years.<sup>30</sup>

The *Press* also reported that William was instrumental in chartering a post of the Grand Army of the Republic. He had found camaraderie with a group of war veterans in Maiden Rock, and together they organized GAR Post 158. William enjoyed planning Memorial Day programs at the Maiden Rock Cemetery. Eventually, because of his active participation, his loyalty, and his story of sacrifice for the Union, the post was named for him. To this day, it retains the name, "W. E. Geer American Legion Post 158."

Highlights in the lives of the village's citizens inevitably ended up in the *Maiden Rock Press*. In December of 1905, a momentous occasion for William received the headline "An Old Soldier's Romance":

W. E. Geer received what was probably as greatly appreciated a Christmas remembrance as was received by any one in town. It was a box from his daughter, who lives near Saltville, Va., and contained numerous pictures of his daughter and her son, their home and a bird's-eye of the salt works; also of the village in the "Gap." In the last picture he can easily locate the homes of his daughter and of his sister; also the old stone spring-house where he drank many a refreshing draught of cool water in his early days.

Among other presents was a cake, a portion of which Mr. Geer divided among his friends. Ye editor received a liberal portion, and we can testify that it was fine. The reception of the box brought up a flood of remembrances of former days.

Mr. Geer has not seen his daughter since he left her, a motherless child, 1½ years old, in the care of his mother, when he was compelled to leave home in 1862, because of his strong northern ideas. He was first taken as a conscript, in the year above mentioned, and was compelled to join Co. G, 48th Virginia regiment. But, on July 3, 1863, at the battle of Gettysburg, he and his brother Tom, escaped and made their way to the Union lines. The brothers became separated that day and have never met since.

Mr. Geer fell in with a company of Union soldiers, and later enlisted in Co. G, 1st Connecticut cavalry, as a teamster. Later he was promoted to wagon master—a position he held till the close of the war.

When Grant took command, Co. G (made up largely of southern men) was ordered to Ft. Snelling to fill a vacancy. After being mustered out of the service, Mr. Geer received word from his mother that it would be unsafe for him to return to the home of his boyhood; so he remained in the north. After spending a few years around St. Paul, Prescott, and other places, he came to Maiden Rock, where he has since made his home. He has often thought of visiting the old home, but his health will not permit the journey.

Thus, at this season of good cheer, was he remembered by the daughter he has not seen for 43 years<sup>31</sup>; and to say that he was pleased is but a mild expression of what he felt when he opened his Christmas box.<sup>32</sup>

This “Christmas box” initiated a correspondence between Sarah and her stepmother, Julia Geer, a correspondence that lasted until Sarah’s death in 1928. In her letters, Julia addressed Sarah as “Dear Daughter” embracing her as the daughter she never had, and Julia even specified in her will that Sarah should receive all her earthly belongings.<sup>33</sup> Unfortunately, Julia never revised her will after Sarah’s death. Therefore, none of Julia’s estate, worth about \$400, could be passed on to Sarah’s son Martie because he was not related to Julia by blood. Instead, Julia’s estate reverted to the state of Wisconsin.<sup>34</sup>

At the time Sarah sent the Christmas box, she had developed a reputation as an excellent cook at the Palmer Inn. She had also opened her home and her table to many traveling Church of God evangelists preaching in the area, including Long and Rimmer. Like nameless widows in the Old Testament who fed the prophets, Sarah fed these preachers from Allie’s vegetable garden and from hogs they raised, which she mentions in one of her letters. In this humble way, she was instrumental in helping to establish the Church of God in the area.<sup>35</sup> By 1909, construction of a church building had begun. By the same year, she and Allie had purchased a house<sup>36</sup> in an area of Allison Gap called The Pines.

A letter from Sarah to Allie illuminates their affection for each other and Allie’s importance to the entire family. Written in pencil, the letter contains random capitalization, inconsistent spelling, and no punctuation. The letter is not dated, but one might infer that the year falls between 1911 and 1916 because Sarah states that Martie and Gould, her son and stepson, “are working.” During those years, Martie would have been between 13 and 18, old enough to hold a job. Having served four years in the United States Navy, Gould had returned some time after 1910.<sup>37</sup> He left the area around 1916 and moved to Hopewell, Virginia. The visitor “fannie” is most likely Fannie (Rumbley) Allison, Allie’s sister. Lily Conkan, Mrs. Keith, Doke, and Frank are neighbors. Nicknamed Hize (or Hizzie)<sup>38</sup>, Allie was staying at an unknown location at this time.

August the 26  
Saltville Va

Dear Allie,

i have just received your letter was glad to hear from you glad to hear all is well We are all well and getting a long all rite Martie and Gould is working they are getting in good time they both wonder when hize will com home Martie said last night Mama I have almost forgot how hize looks he said i want to see her so bad i had to cry Allie he is the best thing to me on earth Gould has got all that pine wood cut up and in the wood house and has engaged 6 moose wagon loads Gould is so good to he don't want me to work he wants me to hire someone to stay until you come back well Allie the cow is all rite She give about 2 gallons at a milking We give the calf half of the milk The hogs is growing rite a long fannie was down here yesterday eaving and stayed all eaving with me for i was so lonesome for God sakes hurry and come home well me and lily Conkan is coming over this next Thursday if nothing happens Cant you meet us at the train now i will tell you how i got disapointed yesterday i thought by me not getting word a Saturday you and some of them over there would be here yesterday so fint and looked but and no one came so i thought i heard a hack coming at 10 oclock I run to see and when i found that I was mistaken i just took me a good old fashion cry fannie laugh at me harty but i could tell she was hurt to Well Allie are you coming before I come over there or not

i got Mrs. Keith to do the work for me to come Tell doke i want her to be there at franks to s————— ——— together for it will be the last time we will all be there i know i will come on the first train if nothing happens Martie wants you to have him some ripe pears Well I will close for this time into soon it is raining hard love to all

Sarah McIntyre

Sarah's letter brims over with affection, not just for Martie and Allie but also for Gould. It is obvious that Allie is an important and loved member of the family, important to Martie, important to Gould, important to Fannie and "Lily Conkin" (Lillian Cochran), and important to Sarah. It also gives a glimpse into the life of the family with references to the wood-cutting, the cow, the milking, and the hogs.



Home of Sarah McIntyre and Allie Rumbley in Allison Gap, Virginia, about 1911. From left: Sarah McIntyre, Allie Rumbley, Lizzie McIntyre Chapman, and Gladys Chapman.

In February 1913, Sarah's father died in Wisconsin. Her step-mother, Julia Geer, wrote these letters in pencil shortly after his death:

Maiden Rock Wis April 22 [1913]

Dear daughter it is Such a lonesome day thought I would write you a few lines I was So Sorry to hear you were Sick hope you are better now I have not been very well I have been So lame I feel some better to day I guess I worked to hard I cleaned house and I have had a such big washings Sickness makes lots of work my but I do miss him So it is So lonesome but I Stay alone I don't feel contented any where else I am So glad I have my home I have been to the grave yard twice I was up last Sunday and put flowers on the grave I feel So much better when I can go and look at his grave I don't feel quite So lonesome it does Seem Sometimes as if he will come back but he never will. I See So many things to remind me of him but it has to be and I must make the best of it God knows what is best for us I think of it every day he don't have to live and Suffer I think he is at rest.

I have not got any pension yet I think So Strange I don't get it I wish I could for I need it So bad I have not got my debts paid yet wish you would write and tell me when your Birthday is and how old you are I don't want you to try to do any thing if you are not able I do hope you are better wish I lived where I could help you

when you are sick I will pay you for all you do I don't want you  
to work for me for nothing

Well I am not going to write much this time will write more next  
time Tell uncle Tom<sup>39</sup> I have not forgotten him and Aunt  
Hannah<sup>40</sup> and Martie how I do wish I could See you all write  
Soon

Love to all from your  
Mother Julia Geer.

Maiden Rock Wis April 26 [1913]

Dear daughter

Received your letter . . . this morning I apreicated your kindness  
when I get my pension I will try to remember you Tell Martie I  
wont forget him he is a good boy, I am afraid you rob yourself  
you have to work hard one of those papers you will have to send  
back I want you to let me know what it costs and I will pay it I  
think what you send me will help me more than anything I was  
married to your father in April 25th 1868 and your father died  
Feb 11 1913. I wrote you a letter a few days ago hope you will all  
keep well I am feeling better I was all tired out have worked  
hard wish you were here to go to your fathers grave in the morn-  
ing it is not so far Sarah don't try to send a box You have to  
work so hard and you don't feel well I want to send a box after a  
little I have some things I want to send uncle Tom & want to  
send the watch to Martie I want him to have it Your father said  
he wanted him to have it and he shall I am going to close

write soon  
love to all  
your Mother  
Julia Geer

Julia shows affection and tenderness toward a “daughter” she  
had never met. It seems that Sarah endeared herself to her stepmother  
through acts of kindness, to which Julia alludes in her letter.

The same month, Sarah's stepson Gould wrote her the following  
letter, revealing some difficulties the family was facing:

Bluefield W. Va.  
204 Reese St.  
April 11th 1913

Dear Mama:—

just a few lines to let you know that I am well. hoping that this will find you all the Same. well Mama work is very dull out here at the present time. but I think that it will get better in a few days. if not I am going to leave this place about pay day which is on the 24th. I marked up for duty last Monday and have just made one run which didn't make me but three dollars. but I am expecting to get out tonight. if I should take a notion to leave this place I have been thinking of sending my trunk home so don't be a bit surprised if you see it coming in by the way Mama I wish that you would look in the vase on the dresser and get the letter that Rush<sup>41</sup> gave me to bring to Bluefield and send it to me. if you can't find it have Rush to write another one. that is if he want to do so. if not alright. tell Me how is Lizzie and the children getting along. if they get in need of anything let me know at once. I am going to send you a little Money Pay day and I want you to pay five dollars to uncle Jim<sup>42</sup> for rent for if I send it to Lizzie she might keep it and then aunt Emma would think that I was trying to beat them out of the rent tell me if they have repaired the house yet? now I am going to do all that I can to help Lizzie. but if that dirty tramp comes back and she lives with him I will never help her again. and futhermore they will have to get out from there. for I think that you have been imposed on a little to much. and I also think that there has been enough scandal brought on the family so I don't intend to have anymore. I am going to send you some money for your troubles for you have been awfull good to Me and I am not the kind of a man to forget. tell Hise to give the little cow<sup>43</sup> some sugar. ha. give Mart a wallop for me. with love to all

Your loveing Son  
Gould McIntyre

Gould's letter reveals the affection and the protective feelings he held for Sarah and for his sister Lizzie. The "dirty tramp" mentioned in the letter was Lizzie's husband, John Chapman, who apparently had left Lizzie at this time.

Some time after Gould's letter, Lizzie and John Chapman did get back together and moved to Dante, Virginia. Whether their move

had anything to do with Gould's threat is unknown. A note on a postcard addressed to "Mrs. John Chapman, Dante, Va." reveals the tension Sarah felt over Lizzie's situation:

March 4, 1914 Dear lizzie What is wrong with you that you don't write Mama is awful worried about you all please write and let us know if Gladas is with you all don't foget to write at once.

Fifteen months later, another blow to Sarah's life came when Lizzie died in childbirth on June 13, 1915 at age 25. The child died also. The care of two small daughters, Gladys, age six, and Lorene, age three, was too much for John Chapman. He soon left the girls in the care of Sarah McIntyre and Allie Rumbley. Once again, Sarah became the caretaker of motherless children.

During these years, World War I raged in Europe. When the United States entered the war in 1917, Sarah McIntyre's family felt the effects. Against his mother's wishes and with a strong desire to follow in Gould's footsteps, Martie enlisted in the Navy on August 2, 1918. His military records describe him as 5'9" tall, 153 pounds, with brown eyes, black hair, and ruddy complexion.<sup>44</sup> Prior to this time when men enlisted in the Navy, they served four years, but as an incentive to get recruits for the war effort, they were allowed to enlist for the duration of the war. This was Martie's choice. When Germany signed an armistice with the Allies on November 11, 1918, the war officially ended, but Martie served several more months. By special order of the Secretary of the Navy, he was honorably discharged on April 17, 1919.<sup>45</sup>

Seven months after Martie returned from the Navy, Sarah made room for a daughter-in-law in the home. On November 15, 1919, Martie married Fannie Mae Myers (1902–1925), daughter of Jacob A. Myers, a magistrate and teacher in Smyth County, and his wife Oma Allen Deal Myers, a teacher and drama coach. Fannie's dimpled smile and gentle ways added cheer to the McIntyre home. Within a year (August 10, 1920), Fannie gave birth to Sarah's first grandson, Woodrow Wilson McIntyre, and twenty-three months later (July 16, 1922) to a granddaughter, Norma Lois McIntyre. By this time in her life, Sarah must have learned not to take good times for granted. A year or so after the birth of her second child, Fannie was diagnosed

with “consumption,” a term used at that time for tuberculosis, and sent to Catawba, a tuberculosis sanitarium near Roanoke, Virginia.

Fannie’s treatments failed to cure her of the disease. Some time after she returned home, she began to keep a diary. Her first entry was dated Dec. 27, 1924, and the last entry was penned in May 1925. Within the pages of this slim volume, she recorded her hopes and dreams and the events of her life. She often mentioned her mother-in-law, mostly in terms of illness or work: “Mrs. McIntyre is sick today,” or “Mrs. McIntyre is ironing.” Fannie also noted friends and family members who visited her, among them two women evangelists, Mayo Moses and Mabrey Evans. Fannie wrote glowingly of her affection for them.

February [1925], Sunday—1

Mayo has been here I love Mayo. I know she is a good girl. This old world we’re living in is very hard to beat. We get a rose with every thorn, But aren’t the roses sweet. . . .

Monday—16

Mayo has been here. She brought Miss Evans. They are such nice girlies and are doing a good work. . . .

Tuesday—24

It is cloudy to day. I don’t feel good at all. The meeting is still in progress, and will be this week. Mayo has not been here since Sat. I wish she’d come.<sup>46</sup>

Mayo was a Tennessee girl, the daughter of a poor tenant farmer, William Moses, and his wife, Martha Oody Moses. At age sixteen, she had been converted during a revival meeting near Loudon, Tennessee, by a Church of God evangelist, the Reverend A. G. Riddle. So impressed were the Riddles by Mayo’s zeal for the Lord that they took her into their home at Atkins, Virginia, to tutor her in Bible study and Church of God doctrine.<sup>47</sup> After her education with the Riddles and a year at Berea College in Kentucky, Mayo began a preaching ministry with another woman evangelist, Mabrey Evans. Mayo and Mabrey held revivals in communities throughout Southwest Virginia, including Atkins, Marion, Christiansburg, and Saltville. Mayo also took interim pastorates at Elliston and Chatham Hill, and she pastored for a few years the new congregation at Allison Gap. Mayo’s strong voice carried across the congregation and out through the windows to the

surrounding hillside homes in powerful prayers and sermons, and she ministered in many homes, praying for the sick.

When Fannie died on September 12, 1925, her twenty-third birthday, Martie and Mayo stood at her bedside holding her hands.

Once again, motherless children were left in Sarah's care, but this time at age sixty-five she was suffering from poor health. Unlike John Chapman, who seldom visited Gladys and Lorene, Martie took responsibility for John's children. Life went on in the McIntyre household. Martie bought property farther up the hillside in Allison Gap and began construction of a new house. Allie later built a barn on the property and continued to keep a large garden for the family. Some said Allie could do the work of any man.

Though she was just a young teenager, Lorene carried much of the responsibility for the care of Lois and Woodrow. Gladys had moved to Hopewell, where her Uncle Gould lived, and found a job. Though Sarah's health began to fail, she kept in touch with her "adopted" children, Gould and Gladys. A few letters to Gladys remain.<sup>48</sup> These letters illustrate Sarah's devotion to these young people whose lives were entrusted to her care as children. That she often signs her letters "Mother" illustrates the way she regarded her relationship to them. Though she did not record the year, indications are that these letters were written in 1927, the year before Sarah died.

Saltville Va  
January 23

dear daughter

it is with great Pleasure to night that i will try and drop you a few lines to let you Know that i have not forgotten you gladis they all well here but me and i dont get no better nor never will some days i can do verry will and some I can't hardly go hope those few lines will find you all right

Lorene is at home she is lots of help to us thire is a 20 days singing school agoing on here now Lorene is going all the time we don't want her to miss none of it for it is good well gladis thire is lots of Sickness and deaths here thire was Some one buried nearly every day last week Mr Charley Surber and his



Sarah Geer McIntyre, about 1905.

brother died at McCrady Gap Mrs lineberry Anie Haynes<sup>49</sup>  
mother and anie die is dead

well gladis i got a letter from Virginia a few days ago i must rite  
to her i would be glad if you and her could [come] back we all  
thought lots of her

well i dont know of nothing els to rite we are a going to try and  
send you a little birth day Bon in next month if nothing hapens

if I could just git around i could do lots of work but i cant i just  
have to Sit here all the time well I will have to close for to night  
hoping to hear from you Soon

So be good and take good care of your Self for thire is so many  
girls kidnapped i am uneasy about you so be carful this from  
your Mother to her daughter

So good night Sarah McIntyre

April the 5 [1927]<sup>50</sup>

dear gladis

i thought i would try and drop you a few lines i would have rote sooner but have not been able i have been awful Poorly all winter not able to do no work my cough sure is bad the children got thir baskets was well Please gladis if i could get out of the house i would have sent you a Ester Preasant but just as soon as i can get out i will send you something nice

Well gladis we had a surprise Party Come in on us last Friday night at Eleven oclock i know you cant guess so i will tell you your aunt dealy<sup>51</sup> and and uncle billy<sup>52</sup> and Ribern Arnell<sup>53</sup> and Earnest<sup>54</sup> and his wife they Stayed all night and went on the first train they come to See your aunt Em<sup>55</sup> and then come to See me i Sure was glad to see them all when you come home Marti Said that he would take us all down there

Well Lorene has not missed a day in school the school aint out until the first of May your aunt Dealy is coming back to go with us down to billys well gladis I don't know of nothing to rite only Gould has got a big boy<sup>56</sup> they call him junior i forgot to tell you that Dell and Hugh and francis was here last Saturday they come and we was not looking for them well the old Gap is just the same only worse there is moore meanness than ever was Known before i Sure was glad that you got out i am a going to try and get Loren out just as soon as we can This is no fitten place for a deacent girl to Stay i am so sorry that Marti come back if i could get out to night i sure would go<sup>57</sup> i am well Pleased with you that you are holding yourself up Conny Phipps has just throwed herself away they made Bunk Whitley marry her the other night he won't live with her no one cares for her Mrs. Phipps is dead buried two weeks ago so Nanny is Staying with Lue Mullens well I will close now will rite more next time don't fail to rite to me i will rite just as often as i can

this from Mother  
so good by my little girl be a good girl

August the 5  
dear daughter

After a long delay I thought i would drop you just a few lines to let you Know how we all are all well as comen but me i have not been able to do nothing sience you was here well i Seen fransias batten<sup>58</sup> She Said to tell you to come back just as soon as you can for She Shur did enjoy you company while you was up at her home you Said that you was coming home in September hop you will come well Mrs. Myers and Charles and fred<sup>59</sup> is all down with tyfoied fevor all are bad Gladis did you See that man about that other half curtoin if you half to pay for it don't pay for it you just See if the man made a mistake

Allie said for you to go and send her them samples of t woolen dress goods and she will Pick her out one and Send the mony to you to Pay for it so dont fail to do that the children<sup>60</sup> has gon to bed Marti is down at times has just come in from the store so I so I don't know of any thing more to rite at Preasant will give you all the news next time

Hope to hear from you soon gladis don't fail to rite to me often for Part of the time I can rite to you and you must not fail to rit often so I will close for to night so be good and take good care of your Self

So good night my little daughter  
this from Mother  
rite soon

Oct 25 [1927]  
Dear daughter

i thought i would drop you a few lines this morning as aunt Marry Collins is waiting on me to take it to the Post office i would have rote sooner but have not been able to go half my time gladis what has become of Lorene don't hear from her Gladis Hizzie was awful Proud of her dress it Sure is nice goods well Virgie Tallor<sup>61</sup> run of the other day and got married India Haynes<sup>62</sup> is Married they both married men from Marion I don't know know their names well I have not time to rite mutch will give you all the news next time when do you think you are coming Soon I hope I sure do want to see you

So I will close for this time this leaves all well as comen hope  
this will find you the Same

So good by for this time  
be a good little girl  
this from Mama  
to her daughter  
rite soon

Saltville, Va.  
Nov. 17  
dear daughter

i will try and rite you a few lines tonight to let you know that I  
have not forgot you Gladis i have been so Poorly that i could not  
rite but i am trying to rite you tonight just a few lines to let you  
know how we all are all well but Martie and myself Martie has  
something like high Blood Pressure he said last night he was  
going to be enarned [?] I am awful uneasy about him gladis Dell  
Balten has moved to Blufield and rented out her home Barnie  
Henderson got his house burnt down the other day that is two  
in about two years he had one burnt here wher we live and then  
bought him a nice place in abbingdon and now it burnt he is  
having bad luck they have moved in the old school house Mon-  
day your aunt Mary Collins said that she was a going to rite you  
a long letter and give you all the news gladis i want you to send  
me two more of those pictures like you sent here i never got one  
Martie give Mr. Moore one and your aunt Mary one so i want to  
send granma Geer<sup>63</sup> one and keep one myself when you and  
Lorene comes in Christmas i want you both to have some so I  
can send granma one she rites a bout you all in every letter i get  
gladis woody said for you to bring him a nigra doll when you  
come Louis wants one to well i will close for this time hoping to  
hear from you (over) soon and see you so don't fail to come home  
Christmas so good night hope you will have a good night rest so  
be good

this from  
Mother to her daughter  
rite soon  
and often  
don't fail to come

Sarah strangely omits an important event from these letters, al-  
though there may have been another letter, now missing, that carried

the news. Sarah learned, inadvertently, that on August 24, 1927, Martie had secretly married Mayo Moses (1898–1988), the lady preacher and Fannie’s friend. They slipped off from a Church of God camp meeting at Christiansburg and were married at Appomattox. As a featured evangelist at the camp meeting, Mayo was afraid her marriage would divert attention from the purpose of the camp meeting — to win souls for Christ — hence the secret ceremony. The couple planned to hand out marriage announcements after the last service, but Martie’s mother discovered one of the announcements as she was searching Martie’s pockets preparing to launder his clothes. The secret was out.

When Mayo joined the McIntyre family, she not only gained a husband, but also two small children (Lois and Woodrow), a teenager (Lorene), a mother-in-law (Sarah), and “Aunt Allie.” She ran an organized and efficient household and continued Sarah’s tradition of housing and feeding guest preachers.

In contrast to Mayo’s strong voice, Martie was soft spoken and modest. He had learned compassion and generosity from his mother. By this time, he was working in the Matheson company store as a grocery clerk. The Matheson Alkali Works had come to Saltville in 1893, and the company owned much of the town. Martie often helped the poor by giving them goods they needed and charging his own bill.

Within a year of Martie’s marriage to Mayo, Sarah died. And so the earthly life of an ordinary woman of Southwest Virginia came to an end. Her life exhibits traits upon which communities thrive. She overcame many tragedies: early loss of both her parents, the stigma of her father’s defection from the Confederate army, early loss of her husband, loss of two stepchildren and a daughter-in-law as young adults, and more. With dignity and with her friend Allie by her side, she used what little resources she had to make a living for herself and for the children entrusted to her care. With her modest resources, she helped establish the Church of God in the area by housing and feeding visiting evangelists. Beyond her own family and community, Sarah McIntyre was unknown. However, in her determined and humble way, she represents many women who faced the hardships of life with determination and courage. They taught their children to honor God and country, to continue the work ethic modeled for them, and to be compassionate, contributing citizens. Thus Sarah Geer McIntyre and

countless women like her helped to weave the social and economic fabric of their communities for the good.

## Acknowledgments

Thanks to my mother, Lois McIntyre Troutman, for telling me stories and for saving all the letters and photos. Thanks to Harry Haynes at the Museum of the Middle Appalachians for introducing me to *The Smithfield Review* and for answering my many questions about Saltville, Allison Gap, and the people who lived there long ago. Thanks to Hugh Campbell and others at *The Smithfield Review* for their comments and suggestions to improve the clarity of this manuscript. From readers, I welcome any additional information that might shed light on the life of Sarah McIntyre and her family.

## Endnotes

1. Sarah's birth certificate states her name as Sarah A. Gear. In the 1860 census, her name is listed as Sarah Ann, and it is recorded as Sarah Ann in the McIntyre Family Bible, but the name on her tombstone, chiseled by her son, John Martin McIntyre, is Sarah Alice. As for the spelling of her last name, in documents prior to and during the Civil War, the name is spelled G-e-a-r. After the war, it is spelled G-e-e-r. For this paper, I will remain consistent with the latter spelling. So too, the spelling of McIntyre varies in records: McIntire, McEntire, MacEntire, and McIntyre.
2. Smyth County (Virginia) Register of Births Book 1, p. 15. The spelling of the name in the record is Gear.
3. The year of William's birth is unconfirmed. The 1850 census records his age as 19, and the 1860 census records his age as 29, which would indicate that he was born between mid-1830 and mid-1831. His enlistment in the U. S. Army on October 1, 1863, records his age as 33. The newspaper in Maiden Rock, Wisconsin, reports, however, that his wife, Julia, threw him a 75th birthday party on January 31, 1905, which would indicate that he was born in early 1830.
4. The marriage date of Margaret Moore and William E. Geer is unconfirmed. The only record of their marriage I have found to date is actually a record of their application for a marriage license dated January 4, 1855, located at the Washington County Historical Society, Abingdon, Virginia, STA VA WA 3.1, p. 22.
5. Smyth County Register of Deaths, Book 1, 1857-1896.
6. John D. Chapla, *48th Virginia Infantry* (Lynchburg, Va.: H. E. Howard, Inc., 1989), p. 124.
7. Chapla, *48th Virginia Infantry*, p. 142.
8. Chapla, *48th Virginia Infantry*, p. 142.
9. Veterans Records, Union, 1st Connecticut Cavalry, Company G, Muster Roll, 1 Oct. 1863.

10. "An Old Soldier's Romance," *Maiden Rock Press*, Dec. 1905, n. pag.
11. "An Old Soldier's Romance."
12. Several years ago, I met a descendant of Thomas Geer, William's brother. When I told her I was descended from William, she said, "Oh! He was the traitor." That remark made 120 years after the fact made me realize how difficult it must have been for Sarah to grow up in a community where some people considered her father to be a traitor.
13. For more on the Melungeons, see The Melungeon Heritage Association web site at <http://www.melungeon.org/>.
14. This version is according to Lois McIntyre Troutman. Other family members assert that Sarah and Allie started working at the hotel after Sarah's husband, Martin McIntyre, died.
15. Booklet is in the author's possession in Anderson, Indiana.
16. Letter is in the author's possession.
17. McIntyre Bible. This Bible is in the possession of Zenobia McIntyre Hammond, Saltville, Virginia.
18. McIntyre Bible.
19. Arnold Family Bible. Cordelia McIntyre Arnold was a sister to Martin McIntyre. This Bible is in the possession of Zenobia McIntyre Hammond of Saltville.
20. Arnold Family Bible.
21. This story has been passed down through the family. The piece of wood Martin was said to be splitting is in the possession of Woodrow McIntyre of Saltville.
22. 1900 Census; Rich Valley, Smyth, Virginia; Roll T623 1728; Page 13A; Enumeration District 83.
23. 1900 Census; Black Oak, Whitley, Kentucky; Roll T623 555; Page 10B; Enumeration District 142.
24. 1900 Census; Rich Valley, Smyth, Virginia; Roll T623 1728; Page 13A; Enumeration District 83.
25. According to Arnold Bible records, Stephen died Feb. 18, 1901.
26. *The Tie That Binds*, compiled by the Women's Missionary Society, Allison Gap Church of God, December 1970, p. 4. Republished and updated in July 2005 as *A History of the First Church of God, Allison Gap, Saltville, Va.*, by Jack Barbow, Geneva Louthen, Thelma Swartz, and Sandra Wassum.
27. According to *The Tie that Binds*, the Church of God movement dates to 1825–1830 when the Rev. John Winebrenner of Harrisonburg, Pennsylvania, began preaching the following points as the basis of the organization: (1) Under the Divine order, believers in any given place are to constitute one body. (2) Division into sects and parties under human names and creeds is contrary to the spirit of the New Testament. (3) Believers in any community organized into one body constitute God's household, and should be known as the Church of God. (4) The scriptures, without rote or comment, constitute a sufficient rule of faith and practice, while creeds and confessions tend to division and sects. (5) Binding upon all believers are the ordinances of baptism by immersion in water, in the name of the Trinity — Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; the washing of the

saints' feet; partaking of breads and wine in commemoration of the suffering and death of Christ.

Influenced by these tenets and by the holiness movement spreading across the country, Daniel S. Warner, of Ohio, began preaching the importance of the work of the Holy Spirit in people's lives. This eventually created a split between Warner and the leaders of the Winebrennarian Church of God. Warner began publishing his convictions in a periodical called *The Gospel Trumpet*. At the time that Church of God preachers from Warner's camp began spreading their teachings in Southwest Virginia, *The Gospel Trumpet* was being published in Moundsville, West Virginia. However, in 1906, the entire publishing company moved to Anderson, Indiana. In 1917, the company started a Bible school, which developed into what is now Anderson University. The headquarters of the Church of God remains in Anderson, Indiana, today.

28. Original photograph is in the possession of Zenobia McIntyre Hammond of Saltville. The author possesses a copy.
29. According to Lelynn Trumbull, a nephew of Julia Geer, "The 'decision of the Commission' . . . probably was a pre-Prohibition restriction of the sale of alcohol." Lelynn Trumbull, personal note attached to newspaper article sent to Lois Troutman, 8 Feb. 1991.
30. *Maiden Rock Press*. n. dat. n. pag.
31. From the date that Geer last saw Sarah (1862) and the number of years since he has seen her (43), one can infer that this box was received during December 1905.
32. "An Old Soldier's Romance," *Maiden Rock Press*, February 1905, n. pag. After searching Civil War records, I have found that parts of this story are not true: (1) Wm. E. Geer volunteered in 1861; he was not taken as a conscript in 1862, although he was forced to return to service after he left without leave in 1862. (2) William and his brother did not "[escape and make] their way to Union lines" during the Battle of Gettysburg. Records show that William was actually captured on July 5, 1863, during a dramatic retreat from Gettysburg and imprisoned at Fort Delaware. He signed the oath of allegiance on Oct. 1, 1863, and joined the Union army then. Thomas continued his Confederate service until the end of the war, in spite of being captured on May 12, 1864, at Spotsylvania and imprisoned at Point Lookout, Md., and Elmira, N. Y. (Chapla, p. 124).
33. A copy of the will is in the possession of the author. The original is in a Will Book at the Pierce County Court House, Ellsworth, Wisconsin.
34. A copy of the Petition for Probate of Will for Julia E. Geer and a copy of The Final Account and Petition for Assignment of Estate are in the possession of the author. The originals are in the Pierce County Court House, Ellsworth, Wisconsin.
35. *The Tie That Binds*, p. 4.
36. Smyth County Deed Book 35, p. 238.
37. 1910 United States Census, Camp Gregg, Pangasinan, Philippines, Military and Naval Forces; Roll: T624\_1784; Page: 1B; Enumeration District: 40; Image: 20, Ancestry.com. In this census, Gould is listed with a group of men serving in the Philippines. A story about Gould's return from the Navy as it was

- passed down through the family might be of interest here. When Gould came home, he found his young half-brother Martie being spoiled by the two women raising him and being picked on by bullies at school. He decided Martie needed to become a man and learn to defend himself, so he taught him some boxing moves and even gave him brass knuckles. Gould told Martie to take care of those bullies, which Martie promptly did.
38. Hizzie is a nickname for Allie Rumbley.
  39. William Geer's brother, Thomas Geer.
  40. Hannah Moore Allison, sister to Margaret Moore Geer, Sarah's mother.
  41. This most likely refers to Rush Taylor, a storeowner, justice of the peace, and Smyth County Supervisor in Allison Gap, who had possibly written a letter of recommendation for Gould McIntyre, which Gould had left behind.
  42. Uncle Jim and Aunt Emma were James Stanfield and his wife Emmaline McIntyre Stanfield, a sister of Martin McIntyre, Sarah's deceased husband. They lived above Plasterco, west of Saltville in Washington County.
  43. According to Lois McIntyre Troutman, granddaughter of Sarah McIntyre, the "little cow" is a reference to Lizzie's baby Lorene, who was a big child.
  44. Enlistment papers are in the possession of the author.
  45. Discharge papers are in the possession of the author. The family story about Martie's WWI service is that he was underage when he enlisted, and Sarah was able to get him discharged for that reason. However, on finding Martie's enlistment papers, I discovered this not to be supported by the existing records. He was 20 years old when he enlisted. Perhaps Martie did try to enlist in the Navy at age 17, and Sarah was able to get him out at that time, but there is no written record of such an event.
  46. Fannie Myers McIntyre, unpublished diary, 1925. This book is in the possession of the author.
  47. Berny Berquist and Maxine McCall, *Posthumorously, Berk* (Drexel, N.C.: C & M Resources, 2000), p. 77. Also, this story was often told to me by my mother, Lois McIntyre Troutman.
  48. In 2003, several letters from Sarah and Allie to Gould remained in the possession of his daughter, Edna Earle McIntyre Beach, in Hopewell, Virginia. Since Edna Earle died in 2005, the whereabouts of these letters is unknown to this author. Inquiries about the letters have not been answered.
  49. Annie Haynes was the wife of David Haynes and the mother of India Haynes, who is mentioned in Sarah's Oct. 25<sup>th</sup> letter.
  50. The year can be inferred from the reference to the birth of Gould Calvin McIntyre, called "Junior," born in March 1927.
  51. Cordelia McIntyre Arnold, sister to Lizzie McIntyre (Glady's mother) and to Martin McIntyre (Sarah's husband).
  52. William Ector McIntyre, of Abingdon, brother to Lizzie McIntyre Chapman and Martin McIntyre.
  53. Ryburn Arnold, son of Cordelia McIntyre Arnold.
  54. Earnest Arnold, son of Cordelia McIntyre Arnold.
  55. Emmaline McIntyre Stanfield, sister to Lizzie McIntyre Chapman and Martin McIntyre.

56. This would be Gould Calvin McIntyre, born in March 1927.
57. Whatever was going on in the "Gap" that caused Sarah's desire to see the family leave there is not certain. Despite this, the family stayed in their Allison Gap home until 1992, when Gerald McIntyre, son of Martie and Mayo McIntyre, died and the house was sold. Martie believed in the people of Allison Gap; he rejoiced whenever a "Gap boy" made good. He encouraged children to do well in school; he gave to the poor. At his funeral in 1966, his good deeds, stories the family didn't know, were told repeatedly by people of the Gap, people who had been recipients of Martie McIntyre's compassion and generosity.
58. Frances Bateman was a principal of the Allison Gap School at one time.
59. These people are the mother and brothers of Fannie Myers McIntyre, Martie's deceased wife.
60. The "children" are Martie's children, Lois and Woodrow.
61. Virgie Taylor, daughter of Rush Taylor, married John Mays.
62. At age 17, India Haynes married Lynn Wassum, as noted in the 1930 Census, Smyth, Virginia; Roll: 2461; Page: 8B; Enumeration District: 3; Image: 627.0. Ancestry.com. She was 20 years old at the time the census was taken on April 30, 1930. One can infer, then, that this letter was written in 1927.
63. "Granma Geer" refers to Julia Geer of Maiden Rock, Wisconsin.