

## Reminiscences

by Jean Cathcart Thomas 1995<sup>1</sup>

### Pleasant Farm<sup>2</sup>

Nannie<sup>3</sup>

I remember waking up in the morning and hearing the cook talking very loud to Nannie to try to make her hear. "Mrs. Wan, Mrs. Wan." That was all I could understand. The milk, the separator, butter churn and mold. I liked to watch all of this. Icebox, clabber and milk.

Big fireplace. So cold upstairs in the winter, sleeping under tons of quilts, he did to get up and dress on a cold morning. Chamber pot under bed—bucket of water in the bathroom to flush toilet.

Grandfather Varn<sup>4</sup>

Loving, gentle, sitting in his lap, walking barefooted with him in the field of peas that had just been plowed, the black dirt felt so good on my bare feet. I remember how he'd go out at night to look at the sky and wonder what the weather would be. I cut my finger with a dinner knife when I was trying to cut a piece of cheese—very small cut, but he was so concerned. I remembered his bushy mustache. Oranges and lemon trees. Foster and I entertained ourselves by listening on the party line. Driving to Frogmore after his heart attack.

Christmas a Pleasant Farm

Big fireplace, big tree, candles. Daddy whispering to me that he had a surprise for Mama, a vegetable dish in her china.

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Grandmother Cathcart<sup>5</sup>

Sitting in her lap, staying in the kitchen, love to watch her decorate wedding cakes—it looks so easy and so beautiful her short fat fingers making magic. Fun to walk in the summer time to the Community Market—her big basket. Running down the hall when I saw daddy. He came to check on me because Mama was in Beaufort taking care of Nannie. I ran into daddy's arms and said, "I'm giving out for my daddy." Softhearted man that he was, he took me home with him. Summers that John, Foster and I spent a week with grandmother and grandfather. "B"<sup>6</sup> was always there to entertain us—rummy, solitaire, go

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<sup>1</sup> I found these handwritten notes in a letter my Aunt Jean wrote to my Uncle John in March 1995. They are clearly her unedited reminiscences. Since Uncle John was by this time very interested in genealogy, I think it's safe to say that he had asked her for her recollections to include in his notes. She also mentions in the letter that she wanted to do more work on her notes; but decided to send it anyway. She included two letters that John had written her.

<sup>2</sup> Home of John Wingard and Jane Vardel *Lawton* Varn in Beaufort, South Carolina.

<sup>3</sup> Family's name for Jane *Lawton* Varn (1863-1955), Jean's maternal grandmother.

<sup>4</sup> John Wingard Varn (1863-1940), Jean's maternal grandfather.

<sup>5</sup> Margaret "Maggie" Elizabeth *Foster* Cathcart (1870-1958), Jean's paternal grandmother. Maggie married John Sterling Cathcart (1868-1947).

<sup>6</sup> Sarah Elizabeth Cathcart (1895-1983), daughter of John and Maggie Cathcart. Spent most of her adult life teaching school in Hartsville. She never married.

fishing. I always slept with "B"—waking up to see her putting on her girdle and listening to her "whistle" as she pulled the strings tighter!

### Christmas in Hartsville<sup>7</sup>

The presents B wrapped looked gorgeous to me—fancy ribbons—manger scene in the gourd, lights in the beautiful shape on the tree. Christmas "B" gave me a boy doll. I was highly insulted—didn't want a boy doll. So I sold him to Foster for a nickel. He slept with, played ball with Tuffy for a long time. Food everywhere, desserts, pecan pies. My favorite Mickey Mouse watch. Pecan pie sent to me at Columbia College.

One summer, grandmother and B made a dress for Mary Edna<sup>8</sup> and one for me out of the same material! I thought I looked terrific!

Foster and I love to go through the trash behind the newspaper office!

I don't know why I don't remember a lot about grandfather Cathcart. I'm sure that he was very good to me. I remember him coming home for lunch wearing a dress shirt and "garters" on his sleeves. I remember going into his room after he got sick and he said, "Jean, do you see all those monkeys on the ceiling?" I was so scared when he said that and didn't understand what was wrong with him.<sup>9</sup>

Grandmother always announced at the dinner table that the pulley bone belonged to Jean. When I was a little older, I was so embarrassed when she said that!

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<sup>7</sup> John and Maggie Cathcart lived in Hartsville, South Carolina from about 1920.

<sup>8</sup> Mary Edna *Blackmon* Cathcart (1919-2002). Mary Edna was the wife of Jean's half-brother, Thomas Madden Cathcart, Jr. (1918-1965). Thomas married Mary Edna in 1941, so I'm guessing the dress would've been made sometime shortly after their marriage, which occurred when Jean was 11 years old.

<sup>9</sup> John Sterling Cathcart (1868-1947). Aunt Jean told me earlier that her grandfather's doctors prescribed arsenic to cure a hardening of the arteries. We may never know whether or not he was suffering from some sort of degenerative dementia or from a reaction to his medical treatment. I have not been able to decipher the cause of death in his [death certificate](#).