

## *A Pacolet Legend: Miss Belle Fuller*

*This splendid lady is truly a legend. Nearly every person who ever lived in Pacolet Mills or that was treated by her for sickness or disease at one time or another. She will never be forgotten. Things were not always easy for her after she first arrived in Pacolet. But she tells the story best to the Pacolet Neigh in 1953. Here is her story:*

### *Miss Belle Fuller Retires*

#### *A LONG LOOK BACK OVER THE YEARS*

Since I am finishing my years of active work it seems that I might just write a bit of my experiences and work during the years I have spent with the good people of Pacolet Mills.

In 1916 after my work seemed ended in New York, I had planned to go to Kentucky and thought of mountain work there, but Dr. Westmoreland, who was resident physician at Riverside Hospital, suggested that I come to South Carolina. He said they had written him about a nurse and he was kind enough to say that of all the nurses in the hospital I was the only one he would think of recommending for the position. I immediately said yes, and after 37 years I find that my judgement was sound.

I came South in October and there was an epidemic of scarlet fever at the time. I think I was the pioneer Industrial Nurse in this part of the country.

I asked what I was to do and no one seemed to know... just look around and do everything I could to help the people. I found first of all that the people of Pacolet Mills weren't too eager to accept me. In the first place I was supposed to be a Yankee, which wasn't good; but they found out I came from Kansas, and that helped.

They were rather suspicious of just what I was here for, and we were building the new houses and some said I was just to see that they didn't abuse the new homes. Others even hinted that I might be a German spy.

Well, since I had to work it all out for myself I decided first thing I wouldn't go into any home unless they sent for me, but you know how human nature is. If that was the case, then they would just send for me.

#### **NO IMPROVEMENTS**

There were no sidewalks, no lights, and rain all

the time, and red, red mud to wade in all day long. When I visited the scarlet fever cases I told the mothers about the kidney trouble they could easily get if they were not taken care of properly, and to prove my point we had it. One of the first cases of Nephritis was James Bryant, so I went regularly to put him in hot packs and see that he got his medicine and proper food.

This epidemic was followed by measles, and we had, I believe, several hundred cases. Then an epidemic of infectious dysentery, and we lost ten babies in about so many days.

We had old houses, no screens, and outdoor toilets, and it didn't register when I insisted that all things used with the babies must be put at once into antiseptic solutions.

Finally I had so many visits to make and so much ground to cover that I asked for a horse. Mr. Westmoreland said I couldn't get around in a buggy on these hills any better than on foot, but I told him I did not want a buggy, only a horse, so Mr. Montgomery, who always did everything in the biggest possible way, purchased a Kentucky thoroughbred for me and that was a happy day for me and the entire village, for I think that everyone, and especially the small boys, delighted in the horse and it was a real sight to see a lady riding astride and going about the place.

When I stopped at a home the little boys came from every direction and the first one there could hold the horse while I made the visit.

Walter White said he always crawled on and sat on the horse while I was at his home, and felt as though he owned the world. Now, when my old friends reminisce about those days they just say two words, "That Horse," so I think the horse made me a great many friends among the small fry, and enabled me to



see many more families during the day.

#### NO STRICT HOURS

There wasn't any such thing as hours of work. I worked all day, usually had classes or clubwork at night and very few nights went by that I wasn't called out when the doctor wasn't available, and sometimes I think they didn't look very hard for him.

I soon found that the work I was doing wasn't nearly enough, so I began to teach classes in Home Nursing and First Aid, both in the village and for the colored people. I feel that this is about the most important single thing I did in those early days of my work, and had the most lasting effect on the health of our people.

We were trying to get the school children vaccinated and the parents, many of them, just didn't believe in vaccinating and had heard of some one who knew some one who had a story of some one else who lost an arm from vaccination, but I never caught up with the armless one.

Anyway, it wasn't long until we had the full cooperation of the parents and only had to say the children needed the various vaccines and they brought them in. Some one told me lately that when we had a whooping cough epidemic I used to go about with the vaccine for the children and would carry a pocket full of hard candy called "jaw breakers," and if the children didn't cry they got a jaw breaker, and of course they were all keen to get the vaccine, for candy wasn't nearly as plentiful then as it is now.

We had baby clinics and Dr. Lesesne Smith, Dr. C.W. Bailey and Dr. Westmoreland came out from town and gave their services to check the children and to talk to the mothers. It seemed then that the doctors always had time to help with our educational health programs and of course it was all volunteer work for our folks did not have much, but were so good to work with.

During the first World War years when so many of our men were in the service I felt that I should go too, and since I was a Red Cross Nurse I volunteered for duty and Mr. Montgomery heard about it and came down and really worked me over. He said with our men in the service it was more necessary than ever for me to carry on here, so I saw the light and decided it would be very foolish for me to leave the work I was doing so we all took it out in knitting sweaters, socks, helmets, etc., and doing other war work. We got such a kick out of knitting on Sunday, and feeling we were being patriotic.

Then we opened the Day Nursery to care for children while the mothers worked. I remember Mr. Montgomery asked me if I knew how to run a Day Nursery, and I told him no, but I knew how to run a baby hospital and that ought to do.

I think the most important thing we could possibly have done, so far as the health of our children was concerned, was to operate that Day Nursery. The children were really cared for as hospital children. They were bathed and fed regularly and their weight was checked and every child had his own bed and much against their inclinations, they had a daily nap. I think it would be conservative to say that a number of strong

healthy men and women today probably owe their lives to the care they received in the Day Nursery.

#### A NEW DAY AT PACOLET MILLS

Of course all of this time Pacolet Mills was growing. The old houses were done away with, and bright modern cottages replaced them. The streets were paved and street lights installed, and then one fine day I got a Ford Sedan to make my visits in. It was one of the first closed cars here and I think I was almost as much a curiosity driving in the glass showcase, as someone told me it looked like, as riding the horse, and how happy the kids that got a brief ride in the new car.

I have seen the new churches built, and taught one Mens' Class for eight years I believe.

I had charge of the Girls Club and used to supervise the Athletics, take the girls to ball games and on overnight hikes, and help them have their parties and entertainments.

I had a little Mothers' Club, and a Sewing Class and a Cooking Class. How I ever found time for it all I will never know, and it seems impossible now that I ever did all the things I did in those first years when it seemed that just everything needed doing at once.

With this rambling story of a lot of busy years, the thing I really want to say is that, if I had the last 37 years to go over I would still think the very best place to spend them would be in Pacolet Mills. The good friends I've made, the very real service I have been able to render, and the satisfaction in knowing that I have always tried to do my best for our people and that now they seem like my people and Pacolet Mills will be the only place that will really feel like home to me.

I want to thank the people for their kindness to me and their very wonderful response to everything I have ever asked of them, and the officials for their sympathetic cooperation in everything we tried to do for the health and well being of our people. Sometimes the ideas didn't work out as we expected them to, but we just switched to something else and went on.

There are so many things left unsaid in this short piece that when I read it over I think it falls far short of the real happenings, and that a book could be written of the last 40 years and would be most interesting to those of us who have lived them away.

While my active work will be over I still expect to live with and love the people of Pacolet Mills, and still find many ways to be of service and to do things that I haven't had time for with a full regular job.





**Miss Belle Fuller making her rounds.**