

# **ROYCE & RUTH STUBBLEFIELD**

*As Remembered By Their Nephew*

*By*  
*Charles Stubblefield*  
**2005**



Home of JR & Sallie Stubblefield – circa late 1890-1930

Also the home of Royce & Ruth Stubblefield – circa 1930-1990

Now in 2005, the second home of Charles & Carolyn Stubblefield

## **Introduction**

Royce Landon Stubblefield and Ruth Givens Stubblefield were two wonderful and lovable people, having many friends, the respect of the community, and close ties to all of their relatives. While I have fond memories of Uncle Royce and Aunt Ruth, no doubt others knew them better and remember things about them that I do not know or have forgotten. However, since buying the old Stubblefield home place and learning more about our history, it seemed appropriate that I pass along to others some of the information I have learned. I hope this will be something readers will enjoy and share within the family.

## **Background**

Royce was born on March 30, 1892, the first of the five children of James Robert (JR) and Sarah (Sallie) Stubblefield. Both JR and Sallie taught school before they married, so Royce obviously received a good education at home, as well as in the Viola School that he attended in his youth. He also attended Nashville Bible School (now David Lipscomb University) and later the Automobile Training School in Kansas City. As Royce grew up, his father spent much of his time preaching in nearby communities, but he also managed the family farm after Royce's grandfather became unable to do so. With so many children to tend to, Royce's mother stopped teaching after she and JR married.

While growing up, Royce learned the fundamentals of farming that he would later put to use. But before he settled down on the farm, he worked for several years as an auto mechanic. It was while he worked in Nashville that on May 14, 1916 he married a beautiful, sixteen year-old girl named Dollie Holder. Dollie, born on April 25, 1900, was believed to have lived previously in an orphanage. A few years after her marriage, Dollie became quite ill and finally died on October 8, 1922 at the age of 22. This, along with the death of his mother on February 1, 1925, brought great sadness to Royce and the rest of the Stubblefield family.



**Royce & Dollie - circa 1920**



**Royce & Ruth - 1955**

As time went by, Royce was able to put the past behind and move on. While still working in Nashville he met Ruth Lee Givens, daughter of Sallie Maude Inman Givens and Herman Ford Givens. Then on December 12, 1925 Royce and Ruth were married, with Ruth just over seventeen and Royce nearly twice her age at thirty-three. While they never had any children, it was obvious that they would have loved and enjoyed them, as demonstrated by the affection

and attention they devoted to their nieces and nephews throughout their lifetimes.

The circumstances that eventually brought Royce and Ruth to the family farm in Viola, Tennessee was something they had no control over --- the 1929 Great Depression. Not only did the economic conditions adversely impact the automotive repair business, but it also caused Royce's father JR to nearly lose the family farm to financial lenders. Before the market dropped, JR had co-signed some notes for his brother George who had substantial farm and cattle investments of his own. There is no doubt that these troubles were a devastating blow to Uncle George, psychologically as well as financially, given that earlier he had been President of The Bank Of Viola. After the crash when lenders demanded repayment, JR borrowed money to help George out and he put up the family farm as collateral. To cover the debt, on March 8, 1930 JR and his sons Royce and Herman, signed a Deed of Trust with The Union Central Life Insurance Company for a \$6,000 loan, to be repaid over the following 20 years. To settle his obligation, on August 19, 1931 JR divided the farm between his two sons, Herman and Royce, with each of them to pay \$3,000 for their share. Herman was to get the North 103 acres and Royce the South 126-1/2 acres. Herman's indebtedness was soon settled with \$3,000 that Cousin Ida Stanton gave him for this purpose and Royce settled his portion of the loan by making annual payments. The houses, barn, and other buildings were not mentioned in the Deed of Trust. There was a verbal agreement, however, that the "Old House" (the house Robert Locksley Stubblefield built in 1863), would belong to Herman, given that Royce was receiving all other buildings plus more acreage. Herman even had intentions of moving the house to his portion of the farm, but he eventually gave that idea up when he was able to purchase a more comfortable house across the highway from his property.

### **Move to Viola**

Exactly when Royce and Ruth moved to Viola or where they first lived is not known for certain.



**Charles - circa 1933**

died several years earlier and JR, at around 70 years of age, probably needed help caring for himself (JR had been injured earlier when he was struck by a

Those that would remember these details have passed on. Even though the farm was divided in 1931, it is known that Herman and his family were living in the Old House then because that was where I, his youngest son, was born on September 14, 1931. It wasn't until around 1933 or so that we moved to the home Herman rented from Mrs. Gunn and later bought. Probably Royce and Ruth moved in with his father, given that JR's wife Sallie had



**Royce & Ruth's Home - 1983**

car while going to his mailbox). Later on, Royce and Ruth moved into the Old House and lived there until JR died on April 21, 1950. During that period JR's daughter Lota lived with JR and took care of him until his death. Then she moved to an apartment in the Sam Ramsey house next door and Royce and Ruth were able to move back in to what was JR's home.

During the time the Old House was vacant Royce and Ruth allowed at least two other families to live there. The first that I know of was the Swope family who lived there during the late 1930's. This was when lunches were first provided in the Viola Elementary School and Mrs. Swope was one of the cooks. I remember there was little variety in the meals and my unkind description of the food was that "Mrs. Swope's soup tasted like soap". We were both surprised and thrilled to learn that on October 22, 2004 Mrs. Swope's daughter and granddaughter, now living in Texas, had left a note saying they stopped by to see the old house where the mother and daughter had lived.

While there may have been more, the only other people that I know of that Royce allowed to live in the Old House was a black family from either Georgia or Alabama. As best I remember, the family had received racial threats and escaped in the darkness of the night from where they had lived. This was probably in the early 1950's after Royce and Ruth had moved back into the JR home. Royce generously welcomed the family and gave them a safe place to stay. Although it may have been a different black family, I vaguely recall that at one time there were some black people living in the Old House that did farm work for Royce for a while.

### Life On The Farm



Verner Garner, left, and Royce Stubblefield take a break during a work day at the old blacksmith shop in Viola. The photo was taken in the 1920s.

Recollections, Southern Standard, December 31, 1999 – 5

One of Royce's early jobs was to work as a blacksmith. He worked with Verner Garner, a man who had a shop in Viola that made and repaired farm machinery and shod horses and mules. After he moved to the farm, Royce set up his blacksmith equipment in a shed behind the Old House. I remember that he had a forge and a large anvil in the shop and, as needed, he would replace horseshoes on the mules that my father used on our farm. The building was not very large, but big enough to store various tools and other things, including Royce's first tractor. Years later his tractor caught on fire and the shed burned up so the building is no longer there. After the fire, he put his tools and workbench in a small shed attached to the granary. The only evidence now remaining of his blacksmithing is the wood where his anvil was nailed and some charcoal in the dirt floor where his forge was set up. I was told that after Royce's death Ruth loaned his blacksmith tools to someone and they were never returned.



**Mule Jane & Locksley  
1955**

Royce was a very good and efficient farmer and he seemed to enjoy it. He wore overalls almost all the time except for church or when he went visiting or was going somewhere important. He also wore leather leggings for protection when working in tall or wet grass. He raised wheat, corn, hay, cattle, hogs, and chickens and used mules (Jane and Bob) to pull the plow, wagon, and other farm equipment. The mules were also put to good use when we had family gatherings at Royce's house by his letting the children enjoy a thrilling ride around the front lawn on "Jane" or "Old Bob". And Royce was not the only one who worked on the farm. Often Ruth could be seen behind the reins raking hay or helping with other farm chores. One year when I was quite young Royce planted a large crop of potatoes and enlisted me along with others to help with the harvest. I learned then that picking up potatoes by hand

was one of the most difficult jobs you could do on the farm. Thankfully there are machines today that can do this and eliminate such a backbreaking job. In addition to his farming, Royce always had a large, clean, and beautiful garden. He and Ruth raised the vegetables they needed and canned or stored enough for the winter in the cellar under the building behind their house. They also had a very large vineyard and several apple, hickory nut and walnut trees that provided additional food for them and others. And I should also mention the blackberry vines they had that my family shared in one year while visiting from our home in North Carolina.



**Royce, Charles, Jane, & Carolyn Picking  
Blackberries – circa 1970**

It was also on Royce and Ruth's farm that I had my first airplane ride. It occurred on a weekend when a "barnstormer" landed his plane in the field across from what was then the Viola elementary school and the same field where Royce raised the potatoes mentioned above. I remember that my dad, my brother James, and I took an exciting flight that must have lasted no more than the time it took to take off and land. I recall that a lot of people from Viola congregated on the field and also took rides. I have always been surprised that Royce allowed all of this to occur on his place. As necessary, Royce hired laborers to help him with various farm work such as wheat thrashing, plowing, and other heavy chores. When he became older he hired Stan Gwyn, a black man that lived in Viola and within walking distance of the farm. Previously, Stan had worked for my father until the children were old enough to do his farm work. Stan was an honest and conscientious worker that taught me many things when I was little. Both I and my



**Brier Blades & Grubbing Hoes**

brother Herman Hall remember working with Stan clearing the “new ground” of stumps. Many of them were removed after they rotted by chaining the stumps to a wagon and letting the mules pull them up. Others were blown out with dynamite. Stan was always careful and I don’t remember any of us ever getting hurt while working with him. In one instance, though, I thought he was being careless by leaving tools overnight by the highway in the fencerow we were cleaning. When I asked why we didn’t take the tools to the barn he said there was no one who would want to steal a brier blade or a grubbing hoe, and to my knowledge no one ever did. Another things I remember about Stan was his singing “Go Tell Aunt Rhodie” while hoeing alone in the corn field. He also bought the first Coca-Cola that I ever tried to drink; no doubt he knew that I’d give most of it back to him when the fizz went up my nose. And it was Stan who once asked me what was the name of my sister. I told him her name was “Sister”, this being the only name I had ever heard Sarah called.



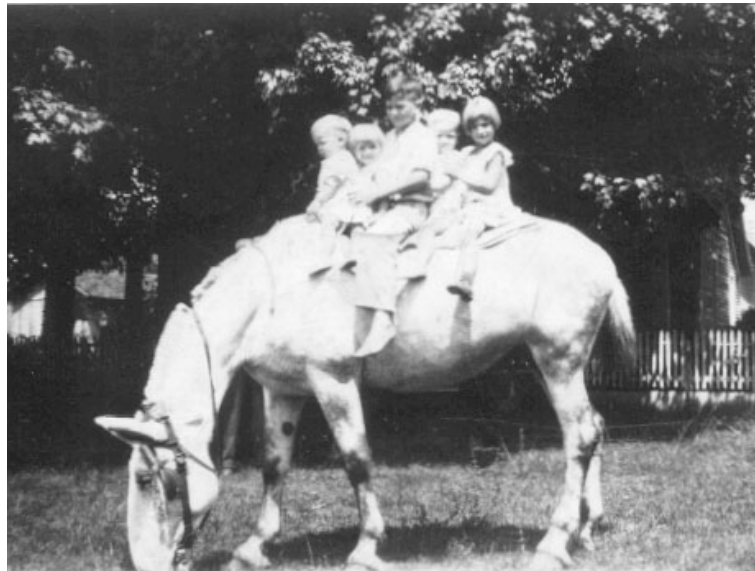
**Royce & Locksley - 1955**



**Royce & Landon - 1978**



**Royce & Ruth - 1976**



**Charles, Jack, Herman, James, & LaNell - circa 1933**

Some of the most memorable events I recall of Royce and Ruth center around the family dinners I had with them, both as a child and as an adult. When I was a kid, at Christmas time Ruth and Lota prepared terrific feasts and after we had eaten, those attending exchanged gifts. When I was older, around the fourth of July Royce and Ruth would host a picnic on the lawn beside their house and invite all of the kinfolks to attend. These were times that I became better acquainted with my relatives and learned to really appreciate the love we had for one another. I think it also revealed the affection that Ruth and Royce had toward the rest of the family. They especially enjoyed all the children and even kept a few toys in their house to entertain them.

### **Hickory Creek**

Ruth was always a pleasant person and a joy to be around. On at least one occasion when I was very young, probably around five or six years old, she invited me, Lota, and my brother James to picnic along the bank of Hickory Creek below the house. Afterwards we went in the creek and she and Lota tried to teach us to swim. I recall that I could “dog paddle” pretty good but it was sometime afterwards that I learned to swim on my own. Several years later it was in the same creek and only a few yards from where we had played in the water that I was baptized following a gospel meeting at the Viola Church of Christ. The church did not have a baptistery then and most of the baptisms were performed in the creek below Royce and Ruth’s home because it was easily accessible and those attending could drive their cars close by. And it was not unusual for baptisms to also be held there at night because the automobiles could light up the area. While I haven’t fished in the creek in years, fishing was one of Ruth’s favorite pastimes. I still can picture her in my mind, as she would walk to and from the creek with her fishing pole. I don’t know if Royce ever fished with her or not.

### **Music**

Just as many of the Stubblefield children have been musically inclined, Royce was no exception. For many years he directed the congregational singing at the Viola Church of Christ. I never knew if he ever studied music, but it is quite likely that his grandmother taught him the fundamentals because she was known to play the piano. At any rate, Royce was very good as a song leader. You could count on the songs to be in pitch because he always used a tuning fork to get the key just right. Royce and Ruth enjoyed visiting other churches in the communities near Viola, especially when they had “singings” on Sunday afternoons. I also found Royce to be a good teacher of music because he helped me learn to direct singing too. This was after I graduated from college in 1953 and engaged in farming for several years. At night I would visit Royce and he taught me how to read shaped notes, to pitch songs, and to get the timing just right. Although a lot of people may think good song leaders are just talented, I found it required a lot of study and work. Royce was also interested in other kinds of music besides church music. Although I never heard him play it, he had a beautiful banjo, a record player, and many phonographic records of gospel and other singers.

### **The Family Cemetery**

Besides serving on the committee responsible for the care of the Viola Community Cemetery where many of our ancestors are buried, Royce



**Charles Weeding  
Cemetery - 1994**

tended the Stubblefield Cemetery for many years. The Stubblefield family cemetery is located several hundred yards east of the Old House. This is where my great-great-grandfather William is buried. As some may know, William Stubblefield was one of the first settlers in the community that was later to be known as Viola. He and his family came from Hawkins County in East Tennessee and on April 12, 1814 purchased 275 acres of land from Elijah Chisam for \$950. Previously, on November 20, 1809, Chisam had been granted the land after the government obtained possession of it from the Cherokee Indians. Most of the land has now remained in our family for nearly 200 years.



**Grant & Beth and New Fence Around Family Cemetery - 1995**

There are 31 graves in the Stubblefield Cemetery, but only those for William and Wilmuth (spelled “Wilmerth” on her tombstone) Stubblefield, Louisa Stubblefield, Robert Locksley and Mary (Granny) Stubblefield, and Mary’s sister, Maria Addelaide Stout (Aunt Addie) are identified with engraved tombstones. The others are assumed to be slaves or perhaps children, with only a rock or small stone marking where they were buried. For years Royce kept the cemetery neat and clean until he was no longer able to do so. He died January 29, 1983. Then my father, Herman, assumed the responsibility before turning it over to me. In 1994, with the help of contributions from family members, we had a chain-link fence installed to protect the graves. Granny, wife of Robert Locksley, who died in 1926, was the last to be buried there. Ruth related to us that she once reburied Granny’s false teeth after an animal had dug them up. I’m not sure we needed to know that bit of history.

### **Old Buildings**

Most of the structures that Royce and Ruth used on the farm are still standing. The Old House was built in 1863, JR’s home was built around 1897, and the barn in 1906. Unfortunately the buildings were not maintained after Royce became old and unable to see about such things. Once Herman and Lota offered to restore the Old House for sentimental reasons but Royce and Ruth didn’t want them to do so. More than 50 years ago I probably contributed a little to the house’s demise when James and I stored some of the wheat we harvested in one of the rooms. The weight caused the floor to break loose, but we later repaired that damage. Now the house has deteriorated so badly that it is beyond repair. The granary is another building that is falling down.



**Granary - 2005**





**The Old House - circa 1980 or earlier**



**The Old House - 2005**

### **Findings**

Several interesting things have been found in some of the buildings. For example the name Herman Stubblefield and the year 1906 are carved in the barn and the initials JR and a cross are carved on a door of one of the sheds. A battered cedar chest containing old bills pertaining to Royce's auto repair business was stashed in the loft of the granary. We've since restored the chest and now use it in our house to store clothes and blankets. We also restored and are using a dining table that had been left for years on the back porch of the Old House. In a loft over the shed behind the JRS house were probably 50-100 pairs of old shoes and there were many letters to Granny from her daughter Laura in another part of the same building. In the rear of this shed is a large hollowed-out log that was used in curing meat packed in salt, and underneath this building is a large cellar for the storage of vegetables and canned goods.



**Barn - 2005**



**Meat Curing Log - 2005**



**Storage Shed - 2005**

### **The Chevrolet Coupe**

As I recall, Royce and Ruth always had nice cars to drive. But the one I especially remember was a mid-twenties Chevrolet coupe. The reason it stands out in my mind was that we used it for a while after it was essentially worn out, not for driving, but to cut wood. Since my family used wood for heating and cooking, my father rigged up the old Chevy with a belt and pulley to drive a saw that we used to cut up our firewood.



**Royce, Ruth & Chevrolet Coupe - circa 1930**

## Sale of the Farm

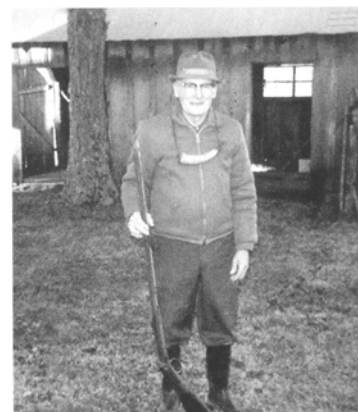
On March 23, 1957, long before he died, Royce created an estate for Ruth by having a new deed written to assign her ownership in the farm. When they could no longer do the farm labor, Ruth rented out the cropland to provide her with some income besides that from Social Security. When she became feeble and was no longer able to live by herself she moved to an assisted care home in McMinnville. During this period Carolyn and I purchased her home and farm and the contents of the house and buildings. The deed for the sale included a life estate provision which allowed Ruth to live in the house as long as she wished to do so. The transfer of ownership was finalized on August 3, 1991. Up until this point she had given away all the miscellaneous things that she wanted others to have. Ruth died August 13, 1996.



**Ruth - circa 1985**

## Things We Learned

When my wife Carolyn and I began to straighten up things around the house we learned a lot more about Royce and Ruth. Like many of us, they had stuff stashed in closets, chests, drawers, and other places. We found numerous photos, most of which were pictures others had given them and essentially all were lacking dates or any identification. There appeared to be few, if any photographs that they themselves had made. There were many books, letters, cards, hymnals, clothing, dishes, kitchen ware, and bank, farm, and tax records that we had to look at and decide what to do with them. Fortunately, we have been able to keep most of their things to use or for their sentimental value. We found several things that had belonged to Grand Dad (JR), such as his straight razor, shaving mug, and letters between him and his wife Sallie. Ruth's collection of cookbooks and recipe clippings attested to the fact that she was certainly a good and knowledgeable cook. Among her recipes was one she had for making wine, which reminded me of how she and Royce had often provided communion wine for the Lord's Supper at church. There was also evidence that she was very active in the Viola Women's Improvement Club and the Warren County Home Demonstration Club. Included in the various nick-knacks was a toy wooden farm wagon that Ruth's friend Frank Gilley had carved. Mr. Gilley was a very nice man that befriended Ruth after Royce died. Before my father's death he often cut Dad's hair while he was in a nursing home. Ruth apparently became disenchanted with Frank and he later married someone else.



**Royce - and muzzle loading gun - circa 1970**



**Frank & Ruth - circa late 1980s**

**Closing Comments**

Royce and Ruth were two Christian people with high religious and moral values. They were well loved by not only their relatives but by all who knew them. They, along with Royce's first wife Dollie, are buried in the Viola Community Cemetery located less than a thousand yards west of the Stubblefield farm. I am sure we all will cherish the memories of them and will miss the joy they brought to us.

## Appendix

1. Graves of Dollie Holder Stubblefield, Royce Landon Stubblefield, and Ruth Givens Stubblefield.



Viola Community Cemetery  
The graves of Royce & Ruth Stubblefield (upper)  
and Dollie Holder Stubblefield (lower).  
Photo taken June 2005.



**(Dollie was born April 25, 1900 and died October 8, 1922)**

2. Royce Stubblefield's obituary.

## **Mr. Stubblefield**

Royce Stubblefield, 90-year-old resident of Viola, succumbed to an extended illness in Warren County General Hospital at 9 a.m. Saturday.

A native of this county and member of the Church of Christ, he was a retired farmer and a son of the late James Robert and Sarah Campbell Stubblefield.

He was married Dec. 12, 1925 to the former Ruth Givens who survives.

In addition to his wife he is survived by a sister and brother, Lota and Herman Stubblefield of Viola.

Carl R. Russell and David Leech will conduct funeral services in High's Chapel at 11 a.m. Monday. Interment will be in Viola Cemetery.

High Funeral Home is in charge of the arrangements.

(Royce was born March 30, 1892 and died January 29, 1983)

## 3. Ruth Stubblefield's obituary.

**Ruth Lee Stubblefield, 87**  
 McMinnville  
 Manchester resident formerly of Viola, Ruth Lee Stubblefield, 87, died Aug. 13 at Columbia River Park Hospital after an extended illness.

A homemaker and a member of Viola Church of Christ, she was the daughter of Herman Ford and Sally Maude Inman Givens and was preceded in death by her husband, Royce L. Stubblefield in 1983.

She is survived by two sisters, Helen Byrnes and Margaret McClard, both of Nashville; one brother, William Givens of Pleasant View; several nieces and nephews.

Services will be held at 2 p.m. Thursday at High's Chapel with Wayman Love officiating. Burial will follow at Viola Cemetery. Visitation will be held from 5-9 p.m. today at High's.

High Funeral Home is in charge of arrangements.

*Southern Standard* (McMinnville, Tenn.) Aug. 14, 1996

(Ruth was born October 3, 1908 and died August 13, 1996)

4. Stubblefield Cemetery near Viola, TN.



**The Stubblefield Cemetery**  
July 2005

Burial site of William & Wilmuth Stubblefield, Robert Locksley & Mary Stubblefield, Louisa Stubblefield, Addelaide Stout, and 25 others that are not identified.



5. Engraved markers in the Stubblefield Cemetery.



**William and Wilmuth's Tombstones**

July 2005



**Robert Locksley & Mary (Granny), Louisa, and Aunt Addie's Tombstones**

July 2005