

95-Year-Old Lee Tidwell Recalls 1927 Birthday, Era Before TV

Lee Tidwell of 808 Foley St. is celebrating his 95th birthday anniversary today.

Tidwell has celebrated many birthday anniversaries but the one he recalls the most took place on muggy hot May 9, 1927, when a tornado hit Poplar Bluff killing 100 people and injuring 350.

He was downtown near the Fisco Railroad on Poplar Street at the time of the storm. He escaped with just a few cuts and scrapes but his Model T-Ford was demolished.

Tidwell explained he had just stepped out of his car and gone into a lumberyard for shelter when his car became airborne. He later located what was left of his car on the other side of the railroad tracks.

Several lumberyards were located in that area. Among them were the E.S. Linton Lumber Company, 442 Poplar Street, and the Metz Lumber Company.

Tidwell was born May 9, 1890, on the corner of Spring and Mill Streets. His father was one of the first constables of Butler County, Justin Ed Tidwell. His grandfather, Silas Tidwell, a con-

federate soldier died as a prisoner of war in Jefferson Barracks in St. Louis. 1962, Buried there.

A lath contractor before his retirement, Tidwell worked in Detroit several years before returning to Poplar Bluff where he helped build the VA Medical Center and worked in several homes and businesses. He served as secretary of his construction union for 20 years.

Since his retirement, Tidwell fills his time gardening, fishing, building bird houses and working in his shop.

There were no stereo's, computers and televisions during Tidwell's youth. He recalls some of the adventures of his childhood.

"My dad had a brother, a sister and more relation at Athen, Ala. He had taken a notion that he wanted to go see them. They lived 18 miles back in the mountains from Athens. They lived in a little community. His kinfolk all lived there. It was called Tick Ridge, Ala. It was a beautiful place. It set in the valley. It was surrounded by mountains," Tidwell recalls.

His uncle had a blacksmith shop at the bottom of one the big mountains.

"The kids used to climb up on them mountains. There was big rocks on the top of the mountains. We would loosen up them big rocks and get them started down the mountain. They would just go like lightning. They would hit the bottom and run away out in the fields. The mountain was pretty high. It was awful step," he said.

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Lee Tidwell, seated, is shown in this five generation photo with his great-great-granddaughter Sarah Ann Heitman, who he is holding, and standing from the left Ruth Ann Tidwell-Kraemer, his granddaughter; his son, Lyman Tidwell; and his great-granddaughter, Lisa Kraemer-Heitman.

Tick Ridge, Ala.