

ANNIE ELIZABETH NANCE

(A Vintage Vignette by John P. Rankin, April 8, 2009)

The front page of the April 18, 1928, "*Community Builder*" newspaper of Huntsville was headlined "**MRS. CAIN VICTIM OF AUTO ACCIDENT – Popular Young Married Woman of Madison Is Killed When Car Is Hit By Fast Freight Train**". Mrs. Cain was 28-year-old Annie Elizabeth Nance, wife of Madison merchant Robert Earl Cain. They married in 1915 and had two children, a four-year-old boy and a 6-month-old girl, at the time of the accident. The newspaper said that Mrs. Cain lived only thirty minutes after the Tuesday morning accident on April 17. It related that "...she was taking her friend, Mrs. Robert Sturdivant, to New Hope to attend a church meeting and had stopped to allow a freight train to pass (at the crossing on Sullivan Street). Immediately afterwards she drove onto the track, not seeing the switch engine approaching at the second track and was there struck and the large car hurled from the track like a feather."

Mrs. Sturdivant had only slight injuries, but Annie died before an ambulance could arrive from Huntsville Hospital. Perhaps it was a case of not looking both ways down the two east-west tracks that Madison had back then before attempting to cross. Alternatively, it may be that the passing freight train blocked sight of the oncoming switch engine if the crossing was attempted too soon after the freight's passing.

It should also be noted that "*The Huntsville Daily Times*" newspaper reported the surviving passenger as Mrs. George Sturdivant, who was another Madison resident. Both Mrs. Robert and Mrs. George Sturdivant were in their 50's at the time of the accident. Robert L. Sturdivant was listed with his wife Elizabeth as age 55 and Mayor of Madison, living on Sullivan Street, in the 1930 census. George H. Sturdivant was listed with his wife Jennie as age 60 in 1930, living on Main Street and with no occupation.

Annie's husband Robert Earl Cain owned a store in the building that was the first such establishment in Madison, the store of George Washington Martin at 110 Main Street. They lived on the west side of Sullivan Street, just a block or two north of the crossing where Annie died. The tragedy was compounded a little over nine months later when Annie's son, Robert Earl Cain, Jr., drowned at age 5 in a cistern behind the store.

Census records indicate that Annie was a daughter of Walter F. Nance and his wife Susan P. Nimmo. The family lived in the "Hurricane Precinct" of Madison County, along today's Hurricane Creek Road. Annie's obituary noted that she had no sisters but was survived by seven brothers. However, it listed only six brothers. According to census records Annie had seven brothers, but apparently only six survived her. The brothers were J. B., John, William, Harry, Robert, Marvin, and Homer Nance. Homer was not listed in the obituary as a survivor of Annie.

Annie's grandparents were John W. Nance and his wife Ruth. John in 1860 was a grocer, age 32, living in Huntsville with his wife Ruth and sons Thomas (8) and Walter (3). Annie's great grandparents were Frederick Nance (born 1793, Virginia) and Elizabeth Clark. They also had a son James Robert Nance who lived in New Market and had a son named Erwin Levitt Nance. Erwin raised a large family in Monrovia. That branch of the family may become the subject of a future Vintage Vignette, but for now it suggests a link and common ground for the introduction of Annie Nance from the New Market area to Robert Earl Cain of Madison. Moreover, there was a Giles Nance enumerated as living very close to Ransom Fowlkes in the Monrovia area in the 1840 census. Giles was listed in the 50-60 age bracket, while Fred in New Market was in the 40-50 bracket that year, suggesting that they were perhaps brothers. Annie's great-great grandparents were James Nance and Martha Sammons. James descended from Richard Nance, who immigrated to Virginia from Cornwall in 1620. Today the Nance heritage in the Madison area is continued through several citizens of that surname and by Nance Road, which runs north to Monrovia from Highway 72.