

YesterYear

Mrs. Sidney

Laura Sidney was a former slave that lived most of her life in the Townsend area and was one of Townsend's most colorful characters (pun intended). Born into slavery in 1850 in Winchester, Missouri, she moved to Iowa upon being freed. There she met and married Albert Sidney.

Like many former slaves, the Sidneys decided to move to the western frontier. They found their way to the small town of Bedford (home of the Bedford Mill). J.C. Ballard had a contract to build the bed for the Northern Pacific Rail Road. The Ballards built a 2-story boarding house in Bedford to house and feed the men working on the railroad. Mrs. Sidney told many stories of cooking for the railroad men at the Ballard boarding house.

With the coming of the railroad and the establishment of the city of Townsend, Bedford quickly died. Like many of the Bedford residents, Mrs. Sidney then moved to Townsend where she had a home on the far outskirts of north Pine Street.

Mrs. Sidney worked for many families in Townsend doing cooking, cleaning, sewing and watching the children of the families.

According to an article in the Townsend Star, Mrs. Sidney's frame dwelling home caught fire and burned to the ground. She had recently had a new heating stove installed in her small home and had gone to neighbors for a bottle of milk. Upon turning around, she saw her home in flames.

The people of Townsend were quick to come to the rescue. She stayed with neighbors while volunteers in town rebuilt her small frame house with lumber donated by Brown Bros. Lumber company.

Gary Richtmyer, a classmate of mine, recently asked me if I had any information about Mrs. Sidney. Gary's father, Wallace "Bud" Richtmyer had told him several times that a small building just north of their house had once been the rebuilt home of Mrs. Sidney. The building reputed to be Mrs. Sidney's home is located

just north of the home at the intersection of Harrison and 4th street; it's tucked away in the trees just off the west side of Canton Lane.

At her death in 1940, Laura Sidney was remembered by the people of Townsend as a good, kind and generous neighbor. She died at the age of 90 in Helena and was buried at Forestvale Cemetery near the grave of her husband, Albert.

The information about Mrs. Sidney is from the Broadwater Bygones and from Harla Gillespie's book "Hidden Tales Well Told". The two small stories about Mrs. Sidney in "Hidden Tales Well Told" are from articles originally published in the Townsend Star.

Both books are available at the Broadwater County Museum. Curator Linda Huth is always willing to spend time with people interested in the history of Broadwater County and a visit to the museum is always worthwhile!

According to Wallace "Bud" Richtmyer, this is the house the towns people of Townsend built for Mrs. Sidney after the fire.

