

In looking thru old records of the Wauhilla Store, it is interesting to note that it was certainly a general store. They handled bullet lead and coffins, wagons and calico, candle wicks and square cut nails, sheep shears and salt, camphor and black powder, and other commodities necessary to the frontier way of life. Green coffee beans were sold out of a big burlap sack, and the buyer roasted and ground his coffee to suit his particular taste. This super-market of old Indian Territory sufficed the needs of the trade. Home cured hams, furs, medicinal roots, and grain was sometimes traded for grocery and hardware items. Mrs. Wilhite likes to remember the people who would come and spend the day at the Store just visiting, but occasionally they would buy some tobacco or a piece of hoarhound candy. She remembers an old Indian known only as Ka-na-na (Butterfly) who visited the store often and was a great story teller.

Christmas in the 1880s was not a time of great gift buying trips, blaring loud speakers, package laden shoppers, and seas of brightly colored lights. Those of Wauhilla Community gathered at Caney School on Christmas Eve to hear the story of the birth of Jesus, watch the school children put on a little program and sing. They had a native pine tree, but without the traditional decorations, save for the little sacks of treats piled under it. At the end of the program the sacks of candy were distributed to the delight of all. At home the children would hang a stocking by the fireplace. The next morning their eyes brightened to find a doll, a pocket knife, a sack of marbles, or maybe even an orange.

The old Wauhilla Store and Post Office stood where Mrs. Wilhite's home is now. The old store building burned several years ago. During its existence the store did not escape the attention of robbers. One night Mr. Keys was visiting a neighbor, Tom Duckworth, who lived nearby. They went out in the yard for some reason, and heard chopping down in the direction of the store, and decided someone was trying to chop thru the heavy back door of the store. They got their rifles and headed for the store by way of a brushy field. When they got near the store, the robbers had given up trying to get in and were walking up the road. Duckworth wanted to shoot at them, but Mr. Keys would not let him. Another time Ned Christie robbed the store. Later, Ned Christie came to the store and wanted Mr. Keys to let him hide in the loft of the building, but Keys refused, fearing for his own safety as the U. S. Marshalls were hunting Ned then.

Even tho hidden deep in the Cherokee hills, the Civil War did not leave Wauhilla unscared. Sympathizers on both sides divided the Cherokee Nation. Keys closed his store and moved down on Red River, and later to Paris, Texas. After the War he returned and reopened the store. Not much is known of what happened at Wauhilla during the Civil War, but the bullet holes in and around a door of the old Key's log house testify to its bitter days. Mrs. Wilhite tells that her grandfather was captured near Wauhilla by the Union soldiers, and was to be shot the next day. The soldiers put her grandfather in a side room for safe keeping, as they were to spend the night there. Her grandmother sent word to her uncle, Will Sanders. Will and some of his friends came and surprised the soldiers and rescued him. They rode all night toward the river bottoms at Ft. Smith. When they reached the edge of the river bottoms, they looked back to see the soldiers after them. As they went into the woods the soldiers stopped and turned back, believing they were heading into hostile territory. The men got away to live and return home after the war.

In remembering families in the nearby Cookson Hills country of early day, she knew the Carliles, Cooksons, Blues, Blairs, Walkingsticks, Doubleheads, and others.