

Items in genealogy files of Ann Arnold Hennings

An autobiography written by Agnes Arnold Ross Swartz in 1989, paternal aunt to Ann Arnold Hennings.

Robert Stoy 10 Nov 2020

"I CAN STILL DREAM"

An Autobiography

By

Agnes Arnold Ross Swartz

1989



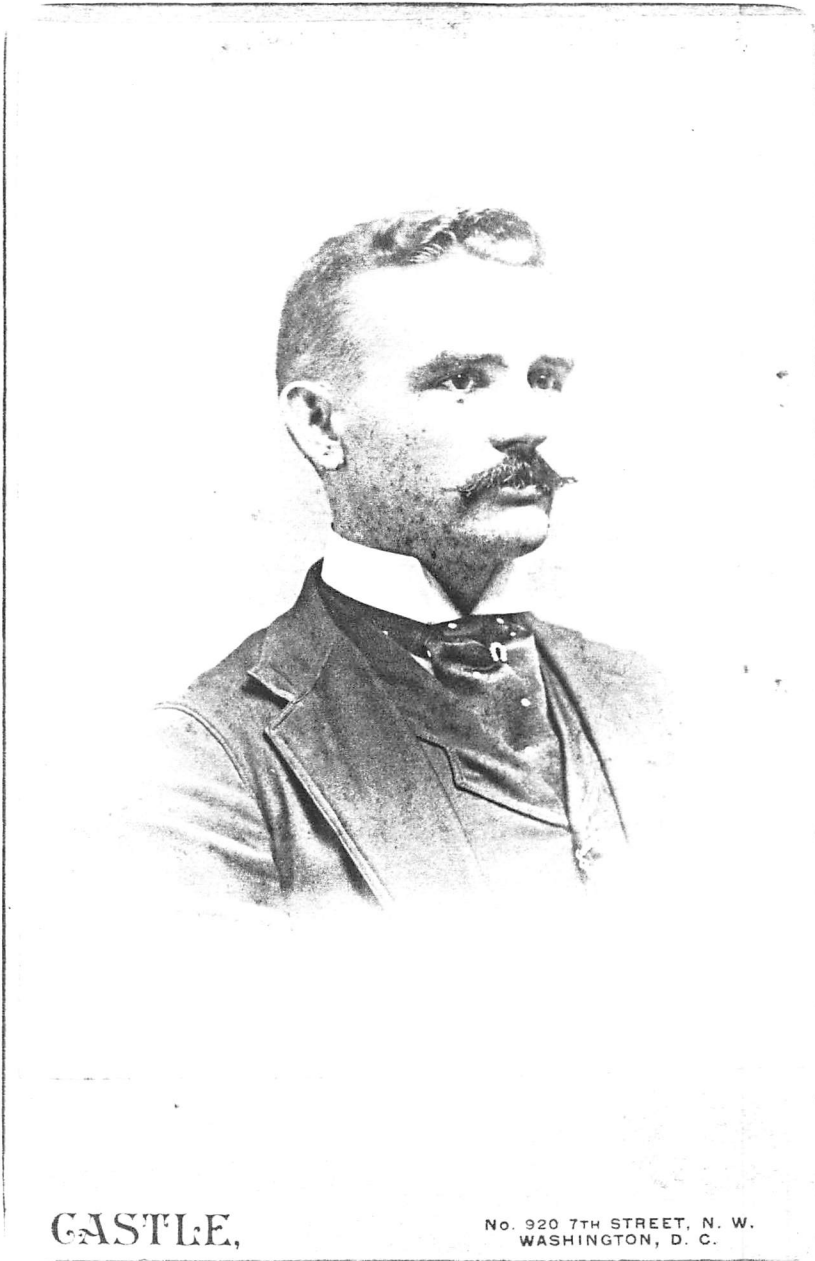
AGNES ARNOLD ROSS SWARTZ
Age 21

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EMMA LOUISA HAYES ARNOLD



CASTLE,

No. 920 7TH STREET, N. W.
WASHINGTON, D. C.

WILLIAM EDMUND ARNOLD

CHAPTER ONE: JOHN ARNOLD

My great-grandfather, Lieut. John Arnold (1782-1863), owned and operated a farm named "Willow Hill" in Shiloh, King George County, Virginia near Arnold's Corner.

Lieutenant Arnold fathered fourteen children and buried three wives. When his son, John Humphries was twenty-one years old his father gave him some acreage and a slave.

John, my grandfather, was restless and didn't want to farm. So he sold the farm and bought a river boat which he piloted from Wilkerson's Wharf, Virginia to Baltimore, Maryland hauling cargo which he sold in Baltimore. He was known as Captain Arnold.

While in Baltimore he met and married a Miss Green. He knew she had consumption (T. B.) but married her in spite of it. She died a short time later. There were no children. After that he sold the boat and bought a farm at Brook's Station, Stafford, Virginia.

His second wife was from Caroline County, Virginia. They had one daughter, Virginia. (Sis Ginny). After she died he again remarried for the third time. There were six children by this wife. Their names were: Caroline, Kate, Johnny, Joseph, Ann and Mary Ellen. Caroline was known as (Sis Tine). Tragedy struck again and he was left with seven children.

To quote my father, John went to the Baptist Church at Shiloh, Virginia and saw Mary Jane Holmes singing in the choir. It was love at first sight, and soon after they were married. Mary Jane became step-mother to seven children. She was his fourth wife. I remember Aunt Kate and Uncle Johnny, who said they never thought of grandma as a step-mother.

When the war between the states started, John and Mary Jane had six children between them, plus the seven step-children. Mary Jane's children were: Isaac, Dorcas (Dolly), James, William, Charlie and Genevieve.

Before the war, the family lived well and happily. Because John refused to pledge allegiance to the North he was put in prison. While he was away the family stayed together and worked the farm. The older girls were teenagers by then. Several times the Northern soldiers camped in their yard and Grandma had to feed them fried chicken, thickened gravy and buttermilk biscuits three times a day. Other food stuffs, including hams, they hid.

They couldn't hide the chickens or cows. The soldiers must have considered themselves lucky to be spending time with three beautiful Southern Belles. No doubt the girls liked it too.

When John was freed from prison he was ill with consumption (T. B.) and died a short time later. The older girls had married and lived nearby. Caroline, (Sis Tine), was the first to marry. She married George Blanton. He had a daughter, named Isla, by a previous marriage. Caroline's half brother, Charley, and Isla were near the same age. Isla called him Uncle Charley for years, then married him.

When John died, Grandma and her son-in-law, Virginia's husband, took the body in a spring wagon to Willow Hill to be buried in the family cemetery. They took a large stone to mark the grave. Many years later I saw the stone. My sister, Helen, and her husband, Marvin, removed the stone and had a marker placed there.

The end of the war left the family in desperate straits, as Confederate money was worthless. Only the older children could afford to go to school. Whenever one of the children was absent, my father, Will, (Billy), took his or her place. Consequently, he had only about a fourth grade education. If he had had a chance to go to school he would have been a smart man. He had a beautiful handwriting (Old English).

When my father was sixteen years old his mother moved to Washington D. C. with the eight children. The stepdaughters, Sis Ginny and Sis Tine, had married and were living in Stafford County, Virginia.

Isaac, Jim and Will all found work in shoe stores. Dolly was a milliner's apprentice. Then Kate got married, leaving Johnny and little Genevieve at home. Soon after, Genevieve died of some kind of fever. Charley had started to work as an upholsterer and Johnny worked with him. They had a shop at 1919 Pennsylvania Avenue, N. W. Washington, D. C. The farm had been sold so the family lived very well.

Isaac was the first to marry, to Margaret Elvira Hayes of King George County, Virginia. A year later Will married Elvira's sister, Louisa Emma Hayes. Brothers married sisters.

Isaac and Jim stayed in the shoe business and retired from there. Will began engraving brass signs and made them for banks, department stores, etc. until painted signs became more popular and cheaper.

Carpentry was Will's next venture and he worked in good weather for the rest of his life. He was good at cabinet making. It was a waste of talent when he could not make a living at art. One time when we were away and he was lonesome he sat at the bureau and studied his face in the mirror. He then painted his portrait. It looked exactly like him. His grand-daughter, Jean Payne Volz now is the proud owner of the picture. It is life size.

My mother and father lived with Elvira and Isaac the first year they were married. Both had babies the same year. Elvira was unable to nurse her baby, Edna, so mama nursed both her daughter, Helen, and Edna.

CHAPTER TWO: (1893-1898)

When Isaac and Elvira (Auntie) moved to Del Ray, Alexandria, Virginia we moved to a place on 9th Street, N. W. in Washington, D.C. That's where I was born. There was a place for a raw oyster bar in the front, with an apartment in the back. Mama said she lived on raw oysters before I was born. Maybe that is why I am so fond of them.

A colored man was a regular customer, so at Christmas he brought Helen a beautiful doll. My parents were shocked. How could a black man do such a thing! They told him that Helen could not receive a gift from a stranger. That was in 1893.

When I was three years old, we moved to Braddock Heights in Alexandria, Virginia. This was a large house with front and back porches. A green lawn sloped to the street. My sister, Helen, was five years old and baby Elsie one year. She was chubby, with dark brown hair and eyes. Her little mouth was like a rosebud. We adored her and loved to play with her. Our mother used to spread a blanket on the lawn in the summer, put the baby on it and tell us to take good care of her.

In the back of the house was a red barn where, Lady, the cow lived. We had never been near the barn and only saw Lady from a distance. Never had we seen an animal so large and vicious. She always grazed where the grass was greenest and she never strayed. Having no fence to bother her, she roamed at will.

One afternoon we saw Lady coming slowly up the lane, chewing her cud, heading for the barn to be milked. She was mama's pet, as Papa was a city boy and never learned to milk her. I remember how the grown folks used to laugh at the way he tried. We were terrified and began to scream for Mama. We nearly smothered Elsie in the blanket and

continued to scream until Mama came to the rescue. Lady leisurely made her way to the barn totally unaware of the three little girls in the blanket. Because Lady was generous, we always had lots of milk and butter. Oh! how we loved Mama's cream puffs.

CHAPTER THREE: (1900-1901)

Then tragedy struck! Aunt Elvira died shortly after giving birth to Kern, leaving Edna and Vernon without a mother. Grandma Arnold, Mary Jane, gave up her home and moved in with Isaac. Soon after, Aunt Dolly, being between marriages, also moved in. Isaac had taken the baby, Kern, to Elvira's mother in Shiloh, Virginia where he stayed until he was eighteen years old.

I am just guessing what happened next. Mama was pregnant and Papa was out of work, so we moved in with Uncle Isaac. (Kern called his grandparents, Mama and Papa, and his father, Papa Isaac). It was a large house with several bedrooms. There were two dining tables in the kitchen and I remember wondering why we didn't have oatmeal every morning like Grandma did. It looked so good. Edmund, Jr. was born in November so we were there for Christmas.

We four children and the cousins were always together. Edna was six and had started to school. How thrilling it was to watch the school bus stop in front of the house and Edna get in. We were lonesome until she got home at noon. (Later Edna's father married her teacher).

On Christmas morning after we had eaten breakfast who should rush in the front door but Santa himself. He came in Ho-Hooing and gave each of us an orange and a gift. We were spellbound. In a few minutes Uncle Isaac came in the back door and we told him all about Santa's visit. He was sorry he had missed him.

When Edmund was a year old we moved to 322 North Patrick Street in Alexandria, Virginia. I will never forget that address, for Papa drilled us in remembering where we lived in case we got lost. We had been there only a short time when Mama nearly died from a miscarriage. We were allowed into the bedroom to say good-bye to her. The doctor had said he had done all he could for her. My father began forcing whiskey into her mouth until she opened her eyes. He saved her life.

CHAPTER FOUR: (1903)

Uncle Charley, Papa's brother, and Aunt Isla were living in Cherrydale, Virginia with their three children, Charley B., Myrtle, Genevieve and Isla G. They told us about a house for rent across the street from them. My folks didn't want their children raised in the city so we moved to Cherrydale.

There must have been well over an acre of ground with the house. A wonderful place to play out-of-doors. We had a vegetable garden, chickens, and a cat. Grandma Arnold, Mary Jane, was with us a lot, as were our city cousins, Edna and Vernon, who were our double cousins. The well close to the house gave us delicious cool water. It was fun turning the handle to let the bucket up and down. "The Old Oaken Bucket".

One day a stray cat came to visit us and stayed. We named her Minnie. She was like a live doll and permitted us to dress her in doll's clothes. We made a little cradle where she slept. Everything was fine until Mama caught her killing her baby chicks. Then Minnie disappeared suddenly. We asked why Minnie never had kittens. Mama said, "because Minnie was a tomcat".

The only transportation to Washington, D. C., where Papa worked, was by horse and buggy. Uncle Charley owned the horse, Papa the stable. Our semi-annual visit to Washington, D. C. was quite exciting. We stayed at Uncle Charley's upholstery shop at 1919 Pennsylvania Avenue N. W. while Mama went shopping.

When baby Worth was born we were told that the house had been sold and we had to move again. The new house was small, but we could afford the rent. There was no well for water, so Papa went into the woods nearby and dug a spring. The water was delicious, like ice water, and full of tadpoles, but Papa said they purified the water. A large barrel was at the end of the house to catch rain water for everything but drinking. "Soft water," Mama said.

CHAPTER FIVE: (1905)

We were there a short time when there was an epidemic of diptheria in the neighborhood. Two children had died before we heard about it. Helen and I started with severe sore throats but three year old Worth nearly died. We were quarantined for a long time. Papa would go to the grocery store, send a note in, and Mrs. Todd would bring the supplies out.

We lived "high on the hog" during the summer thanks to Mama's fresh vegetables from her garden. We also had chickens and a hog. Again the city cousins came. We were always glad to see them as there were few neighbor kids that we were allowed to play with. We were told that the Arnolds were very proud and we should pick very carefully those we played with.

Helen and I started to school there around the dining room table. The Arnold pride kept us from attending the public school nearby. Mama taught school before her marriage and kept her books.

At thirteen years old I fell in love with Teddy, a neighbor. He must have loved me for on my birthday his mother made me a cake and he gave me a game of Tiddly Winks. I used to write love notes and put them on a branch of an oak tree in his yard. I don't remember ever getting a note from him. But I persevered until his mother found the notes and gave them to my mother. They both laughed but I nearly died from shame.

My brother, Gilbert, was born on December 18th. so, because Mama was still in bed, Helen and I had to make all of the Christmas decorations by hand. I don't think we had a Christmas tree that year, but the new baby was enough to make us happy.

When I was 14 years old and Helen was 16, we moved again. This time to a larger house with a well for water. It was nearer the Ballston, Virginia school where Elsie and Edmund went to school. Helen went to work for Jelleffs in Washington, D.C. and I entered school in Georgetown in Washington, D. C. A year later the Cherrydale school was built.

Cherrydale became alive when the Washington and Old Dominion railroad was built. It ran from Georgetown through our village to Great Falls on the Potomac River. With transportation now available, people began moving out from the city. Soon, we had a large hardware store (Shreves) and grocery combined. A drug store, bank, Methodist church and fire department.

A Baptist church was started in a vacant hall with just a few members. I was their organist and was paid \$5.00 a month. I had to be there for eleven o'clock church on Sunday and Sunday night. Also prayer meeting on Wednesday. I was delighted, as I was working at Woodward and Lothrop's in Washington, D.C. for \$3.00 a week.

When I was 16 and Helen was 18, Anna Bischoff moved from Washington, D. C. to Cherrydale. She rounded up as many girls as she could and started the Merry Belles Club. For many of us, that was the only social life that we had. The membership grew until there were twelve members. Our song:

"Rah, Rah, Rah, who are we?
We are the girls of the M. B. C."

By then Helen was dating Marvin Dodd and I was "looking". I don't remember why, but we moved again to a house just off Highway Route 29 and nearer to the Dodds. If we found a house that we liked, we just moved.

Helen dated Marvin; Elsie, Andrew Follin and I, Lee Caviness. Lee was a conductor on the Old Dominion Railroad.

CHAPTER SIX: (1914-1917)

One day we were in the kitchen with Mama when we noticed that she was chewing gum. We remembered that she only chewed gum when she was pregnant. I said, "Mama are you going to have a baby?" and she said, "Yes". The youngest, Gilbert, was seven, and I was 18. We said, "Please don't have another boy as we were tired of taking care of little brothers. Right then we named a girl after Mama, Louisa Emma. She accommodated us and had a girl.

When I was twenty-one and between jobs, Mrs. Smoot, a friend of ours who worked in the Agriculture Department, U. S. Government, asked me to come and work for her. I was delighted, as the job paid twice as much as I had been getting. The building was on 14th street, across from the Bureau of Engraving and Printing.

We worked in the Cotton Section and there were six girls. After the men graded the cotton we wrapped and mailed the boxes all over the United States. I had been working there just a short while when Jackson Weaver Ross came to work as a Cotton Classer, from Alabama. He was handsome enough to be an actor. All of the girls in the office were impressed. Imagine my surprise when he waited for me after work and walked with me to the streetcar going to Georgetown.

He walked to work, as he lived just a few blocks away in a boarding house with two friends from Alabama. After several weeks he asked me for a date. He came to Cherrydale and met my family. After that, we began to go steady. I wrote Lee a "Dear John" letter and that was the last of him.

Because of the transportation, we persuaded our folks to move to Georgetown, where the street cars ran all night.

When the First World War started, Jack joined the Navy to see the world. Instead, he was kept in Norfolk in the Navy Yard, as a Yeoman something. He worked in the infirmary assisting the doctors. There he stayed until the war ended. He made several visits home and I went down there a couple of times. I didn't miss him too much as the city was swarming with enlisted men on leave. We girls had a Hay Day.

CHAPTER SEVEN: (1918-1919)

In 1919, Jack came back to Washington, D.C. Still no marriage proposal. One night we went with a group of friends on a barge ride up the C & O canal from Georgetown to Great Falls on the Potomac River and we trailed our hands in the water. Out of a blue sky, he told me that he wanted us to be married, but he had been unable to save any money on his small salary. He worked for the Treasury Department, in the Bookkeeping and Warrants Division, but the salary was small.

I suggested that I would continue to work at the City Post Office and between us we could make a go of it. Shortly after, he gave me an engagement ring. We were married on August 23rd, 1919. Poor Jack. Five weeks after our marriage I had to go to the hospital for an appendectomy. Jack, of course, had to pay the hospital bill. It was five years later that we paid the doctor.

We were living in the boarding house and I found work in an insurance office. When the Post Office found out that I was married, I had to resign. Things looked brighter but not for long. I became pregnant, which was a shock, and I had to quit my job. Because we could live cheaper, we found an apartment in Georgetown, near my family. Their sign said, "No children", but we took a chance and moved in. Apartments or houses were very hard to find at that time.

Jack took a second job, teaching bookkeeping at Stewart's Business College at night. The evenings were lonely for me, but I was lucky to have my family near. Jack, Jr. was six months old before we were evicted. We think it was because he had colic and cried day and night. If we had only known what we know now that he was hungry, but it is too late now.

CHAPTER EIGHT: (1922)

A widow advertised in the paper for a couple to share her home. I went to see her and explained that my baby had colic and she said, "I don't care". I think the baby's father appealed to her. We stayed there for six months, when a realtor friend found a place for us at 4th & D Streets, N. E., Washington, D. C. It was a three-story house with living, dining and kitchen on the ground level. There were two bedrooms on the second floor and two on the third. Jack's brother, Moody, came to live with us and we rented the top floor to a couple. The extra people paid our rent and we were able to save a little money.

One day Jack saw an ad in the paper, "Building lots for sale, in Virginia Highlands, five miles from downtown Washington, D. C. on the Alexandria railroad, \$10 down and \$10 a month. Salesman on premises." The next day we went out and J. Lee Price met us. The only lot left was one 75 by 125 feet. When we left we were the proud owners of what was to be our future homestead.

We began to plan what to do about a place to live on our property until we could build a permanent house. Jack borrowed \$500 from the bank and began building a double garage on the back of the lot. Little Jack and I went out with him every day, and I took a picnic lunch. Grandad Will Arnold and John Payne helped him. As soon as the building was waterproof and floored, we moved in. Elsie, always willing to help came to my rescue, as I was again pregnant.

The first night that we were there, I will never forget. A light rain fell and it sounded so good and peaceful on our first home. We didn't need a sedative to go to sleep. We had city water but had to use a chemical toilet.

As soon as the bank loan was paid in full, Jack borrowed again and bought sand and gravel to make cinder blocks. He borrowed an outfit from Ramon Bearnse, a neighbor, and made blocks one at a time in his spare time until he had enough blocks for the foundation for the big house. He did this on Saturdays and vacation time, for five years. In order to buy a house from Sears and Roebuck, he had to have the foundation in and property clear.

CHAPTER NINE: (1922-1924)

We moved into our new home (328 Dulaney Avenue, later changed to 728 S. 21st Street) in Arlington, Virginia in October of 1922. Billy was born on May 12. When he was two years old, we bought a Model T Ford and with Dick (Moody) and his bride, Cathleen we drove to Alabama.

We carried a large tent, plus camping equipment. I can't remember how we carried it with four adults and two children. A heavy storm in Georgia during the night nearly blew everything away. The boys slept in the car. We had a camp stove and cooked all of our meals in parks. It took us four days to arrive in Fort Payne, Alabama. When we got home we were hardly speaking to each other. Jack drove all of the way and I lost weight.

We moved into the big house when Jackie was seven years old and Billy was five years old. Donnie was born on June 17, 1927. The boys finished school at Nellie Custis and went on to high school at Washington and Lee in north Arlington. The Methodist Church had been built and we became active in it. I sang in the choir and Jack was church treasurer for a long time. He was also Boy Scout leader. Jack was on the Board of Education for seven years at Washington and Lee High School. He retired from the U.S. Budget Bureau, Office of the President at age 60.

I was married for forty-eight years to Jack, a wonderful man. Life with him was perfect except for one thing. All of my life I had wanted to dance, but my husband was not interested.

At age seventy-two I became a widow. I lived alone in Sarasota, Florida and became a recluse. One day my neighbor said, "Get out of your rocking chair and go with me to the Senior Citizen's dance". These bi-weekly dances were held from 10 a.m. until noon, in the Civic Auditorium. She told me that I wouldn't need an escort because most people came alone.

So I decided to go and danced with a bachelor from a nearby town, Bradenton. He was a retired musician whose home was in Michigan but he spent his winters in Florida with his single sister. He, his sister, and a hired violinist formed a dance orchestra, where they were well known in the Grand Rapids, Michigan area. Both Bill and his sister had taken professional voice lessons and he sang with the orchestra. While we danced, he sang to me in his beautiful baritone voice, which thrilled me. I went

home on cloud nine and danced by myself doing my homework. The next week he was there and so was I. I had gone to the beauty shop and had my hair styled, something I hadn't done in a year.

Perhaps it was our love of music, or just plain loneliness, I am not sure, but in a short time we were "going steady", as the young folks say. We were both seventy-four years old when we got married. The eighteen years that we lived together were very precious. I will never forget this caring man. I didn't deserve this double share of happiness. Now I am old and can't dance any more but I can still dream.

I hope that one of my sons will finish this story of my life.

S/ Agnes Ross Swartz
The Hermitage,
Alexandria, Virginia
November, 1989

Agnes Ross Swartz
(Age 94)

ARS:jwr
7/90



THE ARNOLD "KIDS" WITH MAMA -- 1938

Left to right

Front row seated: Louisa, Mama, Elsie

Second row seated: Helen, Agnes

Back row standing: Edmund, Gilbert, Worth