

# WHY IS GRANDPA TOM GOING TO HELL?

By Cathy Martin Finnie

Just a few generations ago an illegitimate birth brought shame to most families. For some families it still does. The people around such an event can beat us down or raise us up depending on their attitudes and cultural backgrounds. Some of the innocents can be crushed by the circumstances of their birth, but others overcome them and even seem to prosper in spite of their disadvantaged beginnings.

Thomas Clingman Rhodes was born in the mountains of western North Carolina in 1869.<sup>1</sup> At age sixteen, his unwed mother brought Thomas into his grandparents' household. When Thomas was five, his mother, Mary Rhodes, married George Walton Lyda, and the couple moved to a home nearby, but Thomas remained with his grandparents, Eli and Catherine Rhodes.<sup>2</sup>

Thomas learned farming from his grandfather. As a young man, he became a leader in the farming community, despite not having attended school before the age of 10.<sup>3</sup> By some good fortune or love and kindness he learned to read and write and became the secretary for the Liberty Agricultural Club.<sup>4</sup> Farming and agriculture were a big part of his social life, and he participated in the county fairs and farm competitions.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "United States Census, 1870," database with images, Family Search (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MW83-DSH> : accessed 8 June 2016), Eli Rhodes, North Carolina, United States; citing p. 11, family 75, NARA microfilm publication M593 (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.); FHL microfilm 552,642, Baby with Mary at age 17 in Eli Rhodes household; also "North Carolina Deaths, 1931-1994," database, Family Search (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:FP52-LH2> : accessed 8 June 2016), Thomas Clingman Rhodes, 18 Jul 1945; citing Henderson County, North Carolina, v 16A, State Department of Archives and History, Raleigh; FHL microfilm 1,943,262, Thomas Rhodes death certificate with middle name, and mother's name tying him to this household.

<sup>2</sup> "United States Census, 1880," database with images, Family Search (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MCX9-JR8> : accessed 8 June 2016), Eli Rhodes, Edneyville, Henderson, North Carolina, United States; citing enumeration district ED 95, sheet 234A, NARA microfilm publication T9 (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.), roll 0967; FHL microfilm 1,254,967, Thomas, as grandson, in Eli Rhodes household, Mary and G. W. Lyda a few houses away on the next page; also "North Carolina Marriages, 1759-1979," database, Family Search (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:FZBH-SBC> : accessed 9 June 2016), L.W. Lyda and Mary Rhodes, 26 Jun 1874; citing Henderson, North Carolina, reference pg 3; FHL microfilm 589,491, marriage of Mary Rhodes.

<sup>3</sup> "United States Census, 1880," database with images, Family Search (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MCX9-JR8> : accessed 8 June 2016), Eli Rhodes, Edneyville, Henderson, North Carolina, United States; citing enumeration district ED 95, sheet 234A, Thomas Rhodes, cannot read/write, does not attend school.

<sup>4</sup> "United States Census, 1920," database with images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MZVJ-3DX> : accessed 8 June 2016), Thomas C Rhodes, Edneyville, Henderson, North Carolina, United States; citing sheet 8B, NARA microfilm publication T625 (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.); FHL microfilm 1,821,305, Thomas did not attend school, can read and write; also a notice in French Broad Hustler, volume (Hendersonville, N.C.), 09 May 1918, Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers, Lib. of Congress, T. C. Rhodes reporting as Secretary of the Liberty Agricultural Club.

<sup>5</sup> French Broad Hustler, volume (Hendersonville, N.C.), 20 Dec. 1917, Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers, Lib. of Congress, The Edneyville Agricultural Club reports on crop yields, and T. C. Rhodes produced 95 bushels of potatoes on 1/2 acre.

Apart from farming, Thomas worked as an overseer of roadworks in the community of Edneyville where he and his family lived.<sup>6</sup> In his work, he promoted his ideas for making better use of taxpayer money, and his peers supported him.<sup>7</sup>

Despite being an active and well-regarded member of the community, in private Tom often felt the weight of his unfortunate birth. Even though his grandparents raised him and provided well for him, other relatives treated him less kindly, either due to their religious beliefs or from an unloving nature.<sup>8</sup> Some people around him told him that he could not be Saved in the Church because he was a bastard child, and it seems he believed it.<sup>9</sup> He spoke often of his belief that he was destined for Hell, likely because of his illegitimacy.<sup>10</sup>



Family photo of Thomas Rhodes's family, circa 1913<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ruscin, Terry, *Glimpses of Henderson County, North Carolina*, 2014, Print, Quote from a newspaper article on T.C. Rhodes' idea for saving taxpayers money.

<sup>7</sup> *The French Broad Hustler*. volume (Hendersonville, N.C.), 24 Aug 1911, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Lib. of Congress, Article "Permanent Road Building"

<sup>8</sup> Henderson County, North Carolina, Deed books, volume 32 page 486, [item], [year], Register of Deeds Office, Hendersonville, NC, Land deeded to Thomas from Eli; "Interview Larry Rhodes," Telephone interview by author, March 6, 2016, Larry told of his grandmother's opinion that Thomas could not be saved in church.

<sup>9</sup> "Interview notes Larry Rhodes," telephone interview by author, March 6, 2016, whose grandmother claimed she told Tom he couldn't be saved.

<sup>10</sup> "Interview notes Catherine Rhodes Martin", interview by author, May 7, 2016, Catherine heard her Grandpa Tom say more than once that he knew he was going to Hell.

<sup>11</sup> Provided by Lisa Brown, June 2016, family photos owned by James Maxwell

At the age of 24, Thomas married Mary Elizabeth Maxwell, and they started a family.<sup>12</sup>

Someone in his life must have given him hope, perhaps his grandparents and probably his wife, because he and Mary raised a large and beautiful family.

### **Children of Thomas Clingman and Mary (Maxwell) Rhodes<sup>13</sup>**

Lee Edward Rhodes b: 23 Dec 1893	Flora Rhodes b: Abt. 1906
Lela Rhodes b: Nov 1895	Dolly Rhodes b: 07 Jan 1908
Harley Bryon Rhodes b: 20 Apr 1897	James Eli Rhodes b: 20 Sep 1910
Samuel Rhodes b: Aug 1899	Asalie Pauline Rhodes b: 25 Sep 1912
Paul Rhodes b: 04 Sep 1901	Carroll Rhodes b: 31 Oct 1914
Celia Rhodes b: 09 Apr 1903	

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<sup>12</sup> "North Carolina Marriages, 1759-1979," database, Family Search (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:FZBH-V5V> : accessed 8 June 2016), T.C. Rhodes and Mary E. Maxwell, 26 Mar 1893; citing Henderson, North Carolina, reference pg37; FHL microfilm 589,491, marriage of Thomas and Mary, first child born 9 months after.

<sup>13</sup> "United States Census, 1910," database with images, Family Search (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:ML3D-1G4> : accessed 13 June 2016), Thomas C Rhodes, Edneyville, Henderson, North Carolina, United States; citing enumeration district (ED) ED 73, sheet 3A, NARA microfilm publication T624 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.); FHL microfilm 1,375,128. family with first eight children; also "United States Census, 1920," database with images, Family Search (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MZVJ-3DX> : accessed 13 June 2016), Thomas C Rhodes, Edneyville, Henderson, North Carolina, United States; citing sheet 8B, NARA microfilm publication T625 (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.); FHL microfilm 1,821,305, family with later children.