

Riverton Baseball

by Cecil Hayes

In the early 1920s, baseball was perhaps the most popular sport and pastime in Colbert County, Ala. Almost every small town had its ball team. The games were usually held on Sunday afternoon, and people gathered from miles around to watch and cheer for their favorite team.

Sometimes they came in wagons and brought the whole family. They had food and drinks and made a kind of picnic of the event. The ball game was something to talk about all week and to look forward to with great enthusiasm.

"Riverton had the best ball team in the county," Ed Williams of Cherokee told me in the summer of 1978. "It went three whole seasons without a single loss." Riverton was a small town across from Waterloo. It was flooded in the late 1930s when TVA completed Pickwick Dam.

"I had two brothers who played on the team – Burt and Harvey. Burt was catcher and the best in the business. Harvey played first baseman and hit more home runs than any man on the team. But it was Dink Smith, the pitcher, that actually made the ball team.

"He was the best pitcher I've ever seen. He invented what he called his 'drop' ball. Nobody could ever figure out how he did it. The ball would be coming straight at you, then about two feet from the batter, would suddenly drop about two inches, making it impossible to hit. Dink Smith fanned out the best of batters with his drop ball."

Ed Williams acted as my guide during the summer of 1978. He knew the hill country as few others knew it, and he had a hundred marvelous stories to tell. One day he took me to a lovely little valley called Dark Hollow and showed me the house he was born in.

"I was one of 10 children," he said, "and we were all born and grew up in this house." He unlocked the front door and we went inside. "Nobody has lived in this house for the past 50 years," Ed said. "I own the house and three acres that go with it. My wife and I come here about twice a year and clean and make minor repairs."

The interior was in excellent condition for being vacant so long. The big living room was filled with old-fashioned, hand-made furniture. Everything in the room was

reminiscent of another time. The walls were hung with framed photos of long-dead ancestors. There were many pictures of the ball team Ed had told me about. "Mr. Charley Biederman, who managed the Colbert Shoals Lock, manage the team," Ed said. He then gave me the names of the players: Mack Bryson, Guy Mason, Jay Sloan, Joe Thompson, Ellis Harland, Burt Williams, Jess Harland and Dink Smith, the pitcher. Ed's brother, Harvey, was in the photo.

"The Riverton team beat Waterloo, Eastport, Iuka and Cherokee more times than I can count. Finally, bigger and better teams started coming in. But it made no difference. They were all defeated. Nobody could hit Dink Smith's drop ball," he said. Ed died on April 15, 1988.



The Riverton baseball team went undefeated from 1917-20. Team members from left are: Mack Bryson, Joe Thompson, Ellis Harland, Guy Mason, Jess Harland, Burt Williams and Dink Smith.



**Photo of Ed
Williams
made on Aug.
10, 1978. Ed
died on April
15, 1988**



The old Williams house in dark Hollow where Ed Williams was born. It was the last of 20 houses standing in the summer of 1978



Riverton players Burt Williams, standing, and Dink Smith who was noted for his "drop" ball.

