

Ben Hope

In 1925 there was very little government assistance for the handicapped on the local level and none on the national level. There was a county poor house but this was available only to those people who were absolutely destitute with no relatives who could help them.

James Stanhope Love , born on a farm in western York county on March 8, 1887, was never able to walk. He never went to school but was very bright and somehow he learned to read and write. He labeled himself self-educated in a letter to the Rock Hill Record in 1925.

Love, who used the pen-name Ben Hope, wrote that his father had been dead for many years and he lived with his mother and sister in a York mill village known as Lockmore. Later the family moved to the Hawthorne-Hampshire Mill Village in Clover where his mother and sister worked in the mill.

York county provided Love \$3 a month for his upkeep. He saved as much as possible and fervently hoped that he could earn enough money from his writings to build a home that would be properly equipped for a shut-in.

Love painted an attractive picture of himself, saying: "I tell my story so often, so frankly, because of my real need; not because I am selfish, mercenary, ungrateful. I am bright, cheerful, optimistic all of the time. . . .happiness is a state of mind, a determination of will; not the number, variety, quality of material possessions and one's capacity to enjoy worldly pleasures."

Besides newspaper and magazine articles, by 1925 Love, as Ben Hope, had written 5 books and numerous folders and tracts. His articles frequently appeared in the Columbia newspaper "The State," Charleston's "News and Courier," and Grit Magazine, a national weekly newspaper. The writing was an achievement that impressed a number of people who sent him money but there was never enough.

Love wrote that once a year on his birthday, March 8, he had a "birthday letter party" in which he invited people from across the nation to write him. From these people Love said he "learned about folks, things and places." People sent him books, papers and magazines, stamps and cash. He gladly accepted it all, assuring his benefactors that he would use all contributions wisely.

Friends gave Love a wheelchair but he could only use it on the outside. The inside doors were too narrow to accomodateit. In the house

he used a straight-back chair which he alternately dragged and rocked. He said that he had worn out many chairs in his lifetime.

Love found other ways to make money. He tutored school children. He wrote poetry for love-sick young men (sometimes he was embarrassed by the sentiments but those who hired him were apparently pleased).

“Ben Hope” became one of the most -recognizable names in York County and indeed, educated the whole area about the potential of the physically handicapped.

Lucy Ann Bolin, a contemporary of James Stanhope Love, is an example of another western York County resident who was severely handicapped. Lucy Ann had polio when she was a child. As an adult she had no close relatives to look after her but she persevered and was much admired by her neighbors in the village of Smyrna.

She got about by rocking a straight-chair over her one-room log cabin, doing her own cooking, cleaning and laundry. Each day neighborhood children helped by bring her wood for her fire and a bucket of water from a nearby spring. Sometimes she needed extra water to scrub the floor or do washing. To fetch the water she crawled down the steps pulling her chair behind her. She then rocked herself down a hill and then managed to come up again carrying the bucket of water. A witness called the performance “a frightening experience.”

Lucy Ann cooked her food over an open fire. This necessarily limited the types of food she could handle. Also, her income was slight. She had a small pension (her welfare check for many years was \$3 a month). She also made quilts and sold them. She made all of her own clothes and bed linens.

In the 1920s electricity came to Smyrna. Her neighbors then did a remarkable thing. They build her a two-room house with electric lights. And they rigged up a faucet from a neighbor’s well to her house.

After Lucy Ann moved in the new home the village had a “house warming” for her. According to Martha Miller Douglas, “She was dressed in a starched cotton dress that she had made and was sitting in the front door when responded to the crowd that had gathered in her front yard by saying, ‘I feel like a queen.’”

Lucy Ann Bolin, a remarkable person, died of pneumonia in 1929. Like Ben Hope, she was loved by the community and admired for coping so well with adversity.