LOGGING IN EARLY FRONTIER FLORIDA

By

John Thomas Diamond
[1878-1963]

This is a colorful and fact-filled account of the dangerous business of logging along the streams and rivers of West Florida during the early years of the century. The book is rich with description of the loggers, those hardy men who braved many hazards. It portrays the beauty of the land and countryside at that time. It is indeed a description of an era that unfortunately has passed into history. It is full of humor and for the many people who may have heard him tell these stories to them, it is almost like he is here retelling them again.

A Roaring Rollicking Raccoon Roundup

Several times Bud and Sarge had seen large raccoon tracks in the log road along in sight of the Devil's Backbone, a short distance from the Mimms Island Landing. A few time they has seen, late in the afternoon, as many as three or four raccoons cross the road not far ahead of the oxen and rack off up the edge of the Devil's Backbone. This information was reported to Cook, the mighty hunter of the camp. This was interesting news to Cook who promised to investigate and if the investigations were favorable, he would lead the camp crew in a raccoon hunt some night when the weather is right for the raccoons to be out feeding.

Nothing more was heard of this matter for two weeks until one night at supper Cook reported that he had spent the greater part of two afternoons in the woods down on the log road investigating the possibilities of staging a successful raccoon hunt and had found all of the signs to be right. He reported having located the hide-out of the raccoons in a large, almost impenetrable bay-gall a short distance south of the log road opposite the Devil's Backbone. He had also located the real feeding ground of the raccoons on the opposite side of the Devil's Backbone from the log road. It was plain now why the raccoons were making veritable trails in this particular area. "Why," said he "wild persimmons, beechnuts, chinquapins and acorns are in abundance on the Devil's Backbone and the area around the mouth of the creek is the best feeding ground I ever saw for raccoons. It's a raccoon's paradise."

When Cook had finished he invited the crew to join in a coon hunt tomorrow night in this area while the moon light is just about bright enough and the weather conditions are perfect. Of course his invitation was accepted and Cook requested to assign each member of the crew specific duties to assist in making the hunt the best one of the season. Cook promised to have everything ready for the hunt before dark tomorrow. He then was constrained to continue his report about conditions down around the mouth of the creek called by him a few minutes ago, "A raccoon's paradise."

Cook continues: "Plenty of shallow water in there for the production of frogs and fish, both of which are much sought after by raccoons. Stagnant water is there in small swamp ponds for the production of big tadpoles. Deep water and old drifts of logs, tree tops and small drift wood are there upon which raccoons can readily take refuge if in danger from attacks by other larger animals, such as bears, panthers or huge bobcats. Such places also provide protection from dogs and men. Many swamp sloughs, commonly called lakes, are there and all of them contain great numbers of small fish and spring frogs. Also, a short distance over on the river there are sandbars containing fresh water clams, sometimes called mussels. Raccoons are fond of these and often hunt for them during low stages of the river." Here he paused a moment and then added, "Boy's, it's a cinch, we're going to get the coons. No doubt about it. Them coons are there waiting to be caught." Then he added, "They're nearly ready to jump into our burlap sacks right now."

At supper the next night Cook reported that all things are ready for the hunt, and said, "We'll be in no hurry because we must give them coons, the wise old tough ones and the young and tender foolish ones, plenty of time to get from their hide-outs in that old misty, marshy bay-gall to their feeding grounds. We'll get down there about 8:00 or 8:30 tonight, but we'll be back here in two or three hours with a sack full of coons."

After Cook had washed up all the pots, pans and other items of his meager kitchen equipment, he assigned certain duties to each member of the crew. Bud, as usual, was to carry a supply of torch splinters already prepared of course. Sarge was to carry three or four burlap feed sacks and also an ax. Dave was to carry an ax and some torch splinters just in case the party got divided, one group on each side of the creek down near its mouth where it was deep because of backed up water from the river. Ready would be led by Pap and Cook would lead Ruff. Each would take his tired and trusty possum poke just in case the raccoons were too slow about jumping into the sacks. Thus armed, the party headed out down the log road about 7:30 o'clock.

On the way to the Devil's Backbone where the dogs were to be let loose, the men were jovial and enthusiastic about the greatest raccoon hunt they had ever heard of. They talked much about how many they would be able to sack and what they could do with them. "Save the skins," said one. "Cook them like a possum," said another. "The skins make good caps and shot bags," said a third one. This started a discussion about whether raccoons are ever eaten. It was brought out in the discussion that raccoons under a year old are splendid when well roasted. Cook explained that he had often cooked young one and everyone who had eaten them liked the texture of the meat and its flavor.

The next thing anyone knew, each member of the party was relating what he wanted. Sarge wanted a nice small coon skin shot bag. Pap wanted to get a large furry raccoon skin for a new winter cap. Bud wanted whip poppers for his new whip so he could pop the whip loud, "way fore day in the morning." Dave wanted two large furry skins to make a Christmas pair of pants for his four year old, Hopeful. Cook wanted two young tender ones for roasting with sweet potatoes.

About 8:00 o'clock the party had climbed to the top of the Devil's Backbone. Here a short stop was made to decide upon a plan of action. The dogs were raring to go. Ready was to be led by Pap and Sarge a few yard to the right and let him loose, the other men would take Ruff a few yards to the left and let him loose near the end of the Backbone. If either dog treed, both parties would assemble at the tree.

At the big rocks, Ruff was let loose and the men sent him out down the steep bluff. Soon after reaching the foot of the bluff, Ruff gave a few squeals and after running a few yards, bayed. Ready was there within a minute or two and so were all five of the men. They found that two coons had been chased up on top of a large stump not over eight feet high. The stump was standing in the edge of a small stagnant pond. As the men prepared to poke them from the top of the stump, one jumped off into the edge of the shallow water and was caught by the dogs. The men immediately retrieved him and dropped him into a waiting sack. The other one was poked off and also sacked. "Both young one," said Pap,

“Barely grown. Just like the young foolish ones. They’ll go to the old camp roasting pot tomorrow and we’ll have sweet potatoes simmerin in their gravy with red pepper added for color.”

The party now headed up the creek. Ready began opening and headed up the creek within two or three minutes. After running only a few hundred yards, both dogs bayed. The men stamped to the tree. They dogs were baying up a small bushy-top tree. “Yes, another one,” said Cook. “How foolish to go up that bush,” Sarge said. Then two or three men pulled the tree over and lifted the coon from the topmost boughs, and the third young one was now in the sack.

On up the side of the creek the party strolled. Ready picked up a warm trail about a quarter of a mile ahead of the men and began opening as the dogs continued up the creek a short distance. Suddenly the opening indicated that the dogs were circling among some sloughs and swamp ponds where the coon was trying to lose the dogs. The men continued slowly, thinking the dogs might come back down the sloughs to deep water before treeing. However, the dogs soon returned to the creek and led up it again. After running straight for approximately for half a mile the dogs bayed. The men now traveled as fast as they well could in the swamp. Upon arriving at the tree they found both dogs were baying up a large hollow blackgum tree, too big and too far to the first limb to be climbed.

Dave and Sarge soon cut the tree down. As it fell the dogs were let loose and searched for the coon. After searching a while, they bayed at a hole in the tree high among the boughs. A small limber switch was pushed up into the hollow tree to locate the spot for cutting the coon from the cavity. A few heavy blows by Sarge with his ax and a huge ring-tail was lifted out and sacked. Unlike the young one, this old rascal refused to stay quiet in the sack and had to be killed.

The party now went back into the swamp and hunted down some sloughs thinking of course that the barking of the dogs may have caused the feeding coons to leave the creek feeding grounds. After traveling approximately half a mile, the dogs struck trail and led off down the slough as if going to the river. However, before reaching the river they turned back toward the mouth of the creek. After running about a mile the dogs bayed again. It was now all speed ahead to get to the tree and see what the fun would be. Upon arrival the dogs were found baying toward an old dead treetop extending ten feet out over a pool in the creek. The lights located an old coon resting on a large stub of a limb slanting out not over three feet above the water.

The fact that both dogs were wet showed that they had been swimming in the water under the coon. Ruff soon started walking out on the log to get to the coon. Cook followed him with his poke, hoping to push the coon from his perch and let the dogs bring him to shore. As was expected, Ruff stopped at the foot of the limb as if waiting for Cook. When Cook reached the poke at the coon, Ruff clambered out on the limb in a frantic effort to catch the animal before it was in the water. Cook pushed on the coon which refused to be pushed off of the stubby limb. By this time Ruff was almost to the coon. The combined weight of the coon, the dog and the force of Cook’s pushing caused the limb to snap near

the old tree trunk. The limb floated like cork. Ready came into the coon which remained on the chuck as his protective castle.

It was now a race between the dogs to see which one would get the first hold on the coon and pull him to shore. The water was just deep enough for the dogs to have to swim at the chunk. Each time a dog swam up and reached for the coon, the coon balanced himself on the chunk by holding on with his hind feet and one fore paw. The other fore paw was placed on the dog's nose and the nose pushed just beneath the surface until the dog would become strangled and have to swim away to get his nose above the water to breathe. This ducking continued for several minutes until each dog had been almost exhausted and had to go ashore two or three times for rest. Finally Cook stepped off into the water and gently pushed the chunk into shallow water where the dogs would not have to swim. They now sailed onto the coon and after giving him a few shakes carried him ashore where a tap from Dave's ax prepared the coon for a suitable companion to the other one killed.

It was now decided to go back across the creek and hunt up the side next to the Devil's Backbone and then swing back to the piney woods toward the camp. Since all hands had been wading in shallow sloughs the creek was waded at a shallow place.

Soon the dogs picked up what was evidently a feeding coon's trail and after circling around the edges of shallow water for some time headed off up the creek in full speed like a through train. The men followed as fast as possible without stampeding. At one time the opening of the dogs could barely be heard. The men trotted up a little, lest the dogs circle to either side and could not be heard. Soon the barking turned toward the hill country. The men also turned toward the hill country. About the time the men got out of the swamp the barking dogs circled back toward them. "Yes," said Pap and Cook, "That's a wise old rascal. He's now trying to get back in that old misty, marshy bay-gall where nothing can get to him." The men trudged along now with no enthusiasm for raccoon hunting. The thoughts of having to go into the Misty Marsh to poke a coon from a tree or to cut one from a big hollow tree had cast a gloom over the party.

Soon the barking was observed coming back and then it took a turn down the Winding River Road for half a mile. Then after circling a while they turned up the Devil's Backbone, passing within a few hundred yards of the men and continuing on the Backbone and bayed at the highest point near the big rocks known as the "Head of The Devil's Backbone." The party now hurried to the foot of the bluff and clambered up it and headed straight up the Backbone to the big rocks. Here the dogs were baying up a large beech tree.

A small fire was kindled here for warming wet feet while Pap and Cook were trying to shine a pair of eyes in the beech tree. Ten or fifteen minutes were spent but no eyes shined. Then Pap and Cook decided that because of the thick bushy top and the cunningness of the wise old coon, they had been unable to locate him. They still believed that the dogs were not mistaken. They believed the coon was up the tree. It was decided that Cook would climb the tree, taking with him a large torch and try to locate the wise

old rascal that had led the dogs on such a long race and tried so hard to throw them off the trail by crossing and re-crossing the creek, circling and crossing ponds and then had taken to the hill country where traveled roads were run and probable visits made to herds of sleeping range cattle in an effort to lose the dogs among the cattle.

A torch was prepared and carried up the tree by Cook. After searching in vain for the coon in every cluster of thick limbs or leaves almost to the very top of the big tree, a bundle of small twigs and leaves was observed snugly fitting in a fork of the tree, probably put there as a squirrel's nest last spring. Lying curled up in this nest with tail and head almost completely under his body was the clever old raccoon with a head full of tricks. He refused to shake a hair of his tail, budge or bat an eye until poked from his hide-out in the tree crotch. The clever old coon evidently did not like to have his rest disturbed after such a long rambling race because he rolled from the crotch fighting. He bit the poke and held onto it like it was a death hold. He had to be poked and punched from limb to limb all the way to the lowest limb. This unusual disturbance in the tree naturally caused the men and the dogs under the tree to become more enthusiastic than ever. When the stubborn old rascal cleared the last limb, Ruff and Ready jumped and caught him on the fly. They were evidently thinking of the long race he had given them and really wanted to even the score. They would have torn him to pieces if the men had not rescued him and cracked his head a little with an ax. After admiring his huge size he was dropped into the sack with the other two old ones.

The party now had three young coons still alive for baking and three large ones, valuable only for their fine furry skins. It was unanimously agreed that the hunt had been satisfactory. Pap would get his large furry raccoon skin for a new winter cap. Sarge would get a nice young coonskin for a shot bag. Bud would get plenty of new whip poppers so he could pop the whip on clear calm mornings to his hearts contend and hear the sound waves roll and echo among the hills. Dave would get not one but two large furry skins with long hairy tails with gay colored rings around them for his four year old, hopeful, thus providing two pair of Christmas pants that would have beautiful decorations dangling from each ring around them. Cook would get not two but three young tender fat raccoons for roasting in the old camp oven with stacks of sweet potatoes simmerin around them in spicy brown gravy.

Pap was quite adept at making ragged robin rhymes and made up the following on the way home and quoted it while the young tender raccoons were being prepared for the old camp oven.

Young tender raccoons roasting in the camp oven
Good sweet taters simmerin round'm by the dozen
Served with spotted spicy gravy brindled brown
Best eating yet for logging men this world around
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A Possum Hunt up a ‘Simmon Tree

One Sunday afternoon late in October, Cook was prowling around in the woods a mile or so from the camp when he came upon a large persimmon tree loaded with fruit. He noticed some of the ripe fruit on the ground. Some was tasted and found to be real sweet for so early in the season. A close examination showed the bark on the body of the tree contained many scratches made by such animals as raccoons, possums, foxes and probably bobcats. A few deep indentations were noticed in the bark that was made by an animal larger than raccoons, foxes or possums. It seemed a little too small to have been made by a panther and a little large to have been made by a bobcat. Cook’s curiosity had been aroused. He continued his investigation.

The persimmon tree was located not more than a hundred feet from a large thick hammock. Thought he, this hammock must be the hiding places for whatever is eating fruit from this tree. Between the tree and the hammock he located some clean places in the sandy soil and began searching for tracks. Here he locates several tracks made by big possums. The tracks showed the possums had come from the hammock to the tree and returned directly almost along the same route. In this sand he also located some large tracks made by a huge bobcat that indicated that a cat had also come from the hammock and returned to it from the persimmon tree. A long and tedious search revealed the tracks were all made before the dew was on the grass or pine straw which of course indicated that supper had been eaten from this tree early in the night.

On the way back to the camp Cook planned a possum hunt at this tree. That night he spoke to Pap about joining him in this hunt. Pap was of course ready for the fun and too would enjoy eating some baked possum. Later Cook and Pap informed the other men in the camp about the hunt and requested them to join in the fun. Cook explained that a cattleman living a few miles down the river had planted some rich cattle pens in sweet potatoes last spring and would bring the camp a couple of bushels today. This information added enthusiasm to the hunt. The hunt was set for Monday night.

Cook now admonished each member of the crew to be ready for supper early Monday evening so the party could arrive at the tree not more than half an hour after dark. He then explained the possums would come to the tree as soon as it was dark and would leave the tree for water as soon as they had eaten all the fruit they wanted.

About sunset supper was placed on the table and the men were soon there and eating. During the eating, Cook informed the men that the cattle owner had brought the potatoes during the afternoon and they were real nice ones, just the right size to be “Simmerin ‘round a ‘possum.” This of course aroused new interest in the hunt. Pap gave orders to each man about what he should carry. He and Cook would each carry an old time possum poke and with some short ropes lead the dogs until they were needed. Dave would take a couple of large burlap corn sacks. Bud would carry plenty of long fat lightwood splinters. Sarge would carry an ax. Thus armed, the crew led by Cook set out for the tree.

During the first half of the trip there was plenty of loud talking, joking and laughing. Later things began to show signs of seriousness. A quarter of a mile from the tree Cook stopped and explained that all talking now must cease until they were under the tree. He explained that all wild animals can see and hear better than men and at the slightest indication that men are approaching the tree the possums might jump out and head back into the hammock. The men were asked to follow right behind him as he led the way on a path he had picked out on Sunday. Off they went walking in single file Indian fashion. Each man walked like a cat stalking its prey. Near the tree Cook led off in a circle so as to approach the tree from behind a cluster of trees having thick bushy tops.

When the party assembled under the big tree the dogs were let loose and two big torches lighted. While the torches were getting bright enough to shine a possums eyes the dogs began sniffing up the tree and soon began barking. Cook said: “This is proof that we have a possum up that tree and maybe two or three,” and called on Bud to let him have the torch and try to shine that big possum’s eyes and locate him before going up the tree to poke him out.

Within a short time a pair of eyes was located not high in the tree but far out on some long limbs. He handed the torch back to Bud. Cook then kicked off a pair of number ten brogans, picked up his possum poke and up the tree he went. Both dogs now became frantic. They knew Cook would soon have a possum tumbling toward the ground and they meant to catch it if possible before it landed. The men too were alert under directions given by Pap. Those directions were; “Here Bud, stand over there and make the light shine up on those long limbs. Dave, you stand over there and don’t let him head off for the hammock. Sarge you stand a little nearer to Dave. If he escapes the dogs and me, surely you and Dave will stop him.”

Cook was now on the right limb and crawling out on it a short distance so his poke would reach the possum. The long forked poke was placed mid-ribs on the possum and held steady while Cook steadied himself for a hard shove. When he was ready he yelled, “Look out boys, he’s a coming, and he’s as big as a year old shoat.” He then pushed so suddenly and hard until the possum was pushed entirely beyond the ends of the limbs and tumbled to the ground. The big fast beastie landed on his feet with head pointed toward the hammock, ready to head for his hide-out, but before he could make the first jump Pap pinned him to the ground with his long forked pitchfork like poke. Ruff and Ready, true to their names, were there and in full action. They were pulled loose as quickly as possible and a possum that appeared to be “As big as a year old shoat” was dropped into a sack where he “sulked.”

Five men and two dogs were now in high spirits. The possum was truly “In the poke” but the men were looking straight at it simmerin in the old camp oven with sweet potatoes sizzling in the gravy. The next minute they were smacking their lips and swearing that the taste is delicious. Oh boy!

Cook had now climbed back on the limb to the body of the tree and was resting. He now requested Pap to take a big torch and try to locate another pair of eyes in the tree before

he, Cook, climbed any higher. Within about five minutes Pap had located another possum on the opposite side of the tree from where the first one had been poked out, but a little higher up out near the end of the long boughs where the sun makes the fruit sweeter.

Cook was told the exact location of the possum. Immediately he moved up higher and out a few feet on the right limbs. The possum was soon located and the long forked poke placed a-midship ready for a hard push. Cook yelled, “Look out below” as he pushed hard. Then men and dogs on the ground looked eagerly but in vain. No possum dropped. The long tail was well wound around a limb and refused to unwind. The possum was pushed from the limb but the tail held firmly as the possum dangled in the air suspended by the tail

Cook pushed against the possum a few times but without any effect. The tail just wouldn’t slip.

Cook now balanced himself on a stout limb holding to another limb with his feet and by reaching far out to the side the forks of the poke were placed, one prong on top of the small limb beside the tail and the other prong under the limb back toward the tree trunk. The poke was then twisted and the small limb supporting the possum was broken off and it fell to the ground with the possum. Pap and Dave were holding a large wheat bran sack with its mouth wide open and were able to catch the possum in it and thus avoid any possible danger of its getting wounded by the dogs. Cook now came down for a resting spell during a celebration period lasting ten minutes or more. The camp crew would now feast on baked possum and taters as they had never feasted before. They ate possum, sopped the gravy and gnawed the bones, all in a few minutes. Then stretched out and rubbed full paunches.

They began to talk about going home when someone suggested it might be wise to look for another possum in that tree because possums have been known to scatter all about in a big tree as the beginning of the persimmon season when they are real hungry for the delicious fruit. Soon Pap and Cook were each holding a big bright torch behind their heads and searching for another pair of eyes. After a long and thorough search, a pair of eyes was located near the top of the tree.

Cook, who was the expert climber, again kicked off his shoes and climbed up the tree, taking his poke. As he went up, the dogs began barking furiously at the thoughts of seeing another possum tumble from the tree. The men too, rejoiced that they had not gone off and left the third one safe in the top of the tall tree.

Cook was slow in reaching the top of the tree. The limbs were a little thick in some places. At other places it was found to be necessary to hug the tree truck in getting from one cluster of limbs to another. Finally Cook yelled to the boys below: “Boys, look out I’m now reaching toward him with the poke and may soon have him tumbling down. He’ll probably catch on lower boughs and have to be poked loose several times. Keep a close lookout.”

About this time the poke touched the possum which quickly changed to a big bobcat and sailed out from the top of the tree without touching a single bough or leaf. The cat landed entirely outside the circle of men and dogs waiting for a possum to tumble down among the boughs and rustle the leaves.

The men and dogs heard the big cat hit the ground after a jump from its perch forty feet high. It immediately headed for the hammock with both dogs right at its heels. The two big torches were held high in an effort to see the dogs catch the cat before it was safe in the thick brambles of the hammock. All the men declared that the dogs were snapping at the cat's rear end as it disappeared in a clump of vines and bushes. Sarge said, "Just missed him by a tail's length." "Suppose that means if he hadn't been a bobcat he would have been caught," said Pap. By this time the dogs bayed as if treed, not over fifty feet from the edge of the hammock.

Pap and Sarge went on into the hammock with one torch, leaving the other two men to bring the possums with Cook. Soon all the men found the cat had been forced to take refuge by running up a slanting magnolia bay tree that had been blown over with its top resting not more than ten or twelve feet above the ground. As the men surrounded the fallen bay top, the big bobcat was discovered quietly sitting near the top of the tree. Ready was directly under the cat, baying fiercely. Ruff was walking up the trunk of the slanting bay tree and was within ten feet of the cat, which, judging from its demeanor had made up his mind to fight rather than jump and risk another race. He had evidently felt a few snaps on his rear end about the time he entered the hammock and again as he took refuge on the slanting bay tree. As Ruff approached, the old cat bared his long teeth, turned his hair the wrong way and arched his back. Ruff looked the cat straight in the eyes and kept cautiously placing his feet in the center of the tree trunk by feeling his way instead of looking. When Ruff was close up, almost within biting distance, the cat raised a forepaw and began motioning at the dog as if about to strike. Ruff moved up, inch by inch. Soon the cat made the strike, evidently thinking the dog would dodge and tumble from the tree top. Instead, Ruff moved back just enough to cause the cat to miss. The cat leaned over a little to better balance himself and placed his paw back on the tree trunk. As it went down, Ruff sprang and caught the cat by the neck and off tumbled both, going down through the bay top and bushes to the ground. The fight was now one. Ready grabbed the old bobcat by a ham and stretched him out full length. The cat had a light hold on Ruff's shoulder and was chewing fiercely to get a better one. Ruff was also painfully scratched and ripped by the cat's forepaws. Cook rushed in and pinned the cat's forepaws to the ground. Pap then stepped over some limbs and tapped the cat's head with his ax and ended the fight.

Each dog had several skin wounds. None were large enough to require stitches. Within a few days they were healed.

The men gathered up their possums, cat, ax and pokes and headed for the camp, having been gone only about two hours. The bobcat was skinned and the hide was saved because it was an extra large one. The possums were caged to be killed later by Cook when he was ready to roast them.

Suppers for the next two days at this camp were:

Big fat possum, tender and crisp
Sweet taters like a man would wish
Basted with heavenly sauce divine
Served with brown gravy sublime
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Mistaken Identity

One night about 9:00 o'clock when Cook had finished washing the camp dishes, pans and pots, he decided to go to the spring and get two buckets of water for use in getting breakfast ready the next morning. He picked up the buckets and walked out at the back door leaving it wide open behind him. The spring was two hundred yards from the camp down under a small hill and bluff. The night was almost perfectly dark although the moon was giving a little light but it was mostly shut out by slow moving clouds. The trail to the spring was plain and Cook had often traveled it during darkness. He preferred to do this rather than to bother with a torch light. And too, once and a while streaks of moon light would shine through the thinner layers of clouds and make it possible for one to see his way without a light.

Sarge, as was his custom, had put on his long night shirt and in log camp parlance "Hit the bunk." Pap was busy around the fireplace preparing his usual can of bedtime coffee. Bud and Dave were sitting on blocks and improvised seats near a dim fire and engaged in conversation.

The two ox teams were in the lot two hundred feet away from the camp house. Cook's dogs, Ruff & Ready, were shut up in an improvised dog pen made by Cook. A bunch of camp razorback hogs were prowling about the camp and feed lot and trying to find an opening to get back in the lot from which they had been driver when Bud and Sarge had distributed hay over the lot for the oxen. Only a short time before, Cook had moved rails from an old partly decayed fence formerly enclosing a small field and made a low fence around the camp house to prevent the hogs from sleeping under it. No gate had been provided at either the back or front of this camp. Men had to climb over the fence as they left the camp or returned.

Directly after Cook walked out toward the spring, a shoat began squealing seemingly out about the lot. Pap stopped drinking coffee long enough to suggest to Bud and Dave to go get that sharp nosed shoat from a fence crack. Bud said, "No, let him wiggle on through. He'll do that anyhow before we could get out there in the dark." The shoat kept squealing. Dave suggested that a bear may have slipped up and caught one on the back side of the lot, since they were all shut out that night. The mentioning of a bear interested Pap who said, "Get a light and let's go." Bud grabbed some fat lightwood splinters in the corner and started to light them from the dim fire on the hearth. Pap showed him how to pick up, between the splinters, a small burning knot that would light the splinters as they made their way to the lot. With this done, off they went. As Pap stepped from the door he picked up his big sharp long handled log chopping ax and carried it with him.

As Bud got over the yard fence he dropped his burning knot from between his splinters and had to stop to pick it up. Dave waited for him. Pap hurried on toward the lot. At the lot he stopped to determine the location of the squealing shoat. It appeared to be a few fence corners around on the back side of the lot. He moved up to the corner and listened

again. Bud and Dave came slipping behind him, their splinters not yet having caught fire since the burning knot was picked up at the yard fence.
Pap now was certain that the trouble was a shoat hung in a fence crack. He moved up another fence corner and stopped to listen. In addition to hearing shoat squeals he thought he heard scratching against the old fence rails different from the sounds made by a shoat's hoofs striking against a rail. A heavy cloud was now moving so that the light was coming through the thin layer of clouds. And too, Pap's eyes were getting better adjusted to the darkness. Bud and Dave eased up close to Pap as if frightened because of Pap's cautiousness in approaching the squealing shoat. They whispered to him but he paid no attention and moved up another fence corner and peered into the corner where the squealing shoat was.

The moon light came through the thin layer of clouds so that he could see some better. Plainly he was looking at a large black bear holding a shoat by one hind foot with all the rest of the shoat having gotten through the fence crack in the lot. The bear had one fore foot through the fence crack trying in vain to push the shoat back out of the crack. Pap looked around to see what had become of Bud and Dave since he had declined to pay any attention to them. They were standing motionless about fifteen feet behind. Pap looked at the moon, wishing for a little more light. His eyes were stained. His big ax was now raised higher and the sharp blade turned down for striking because he had decided to try to chop into the bear's backbone. With ax raised he stepped forward a little but cautiously, lest his presence be detected by the busy bear thinking only of a tasty tender shoat. As Pap brought the heavy ax down, he plainly saw the bear's big ears sticking up a few inches from the fence and decided he might land the blow between the ears instead of on the back, so he made another step and struck with all his might.

The bear reared up backwards on his hind feet. The ax struck fast. Pap held tight, well knowing that it was his only weapon of defense in dealing with a wounded bear. The bear fell over backwards toward Pap's feet. The fall caused the ax to slip loose. The bear scrambled and struggled and at the same time making strange sounds. Pap backed off yelling to Bud and Dave: "Look out, it's a bear." Bud and Dave now made three or four jumps and Pap heard the front door slam shut. Pap stood still peering with strained eyes at the bear bouncing about like an old biddy with its head suddenly severed. Pap said later that he thought he had chopped the bear on the back of the neck and only creased him and was prepared to strike the fatal blow as soon as the bear got still enough. When he stuck the second blow, the bear was already dead. Later he found the ax had sunk deep into the top of the bear's head instead of the neck.

Pap now called for Bud and Dave to come and help him take the bear to the camp house or in the yard where they could dress it. They failed to answer. Pap then took the bear by one hind leg and dragged it to the little yard fence. He took off two or three rails so he could better lift the bear over the fence. This was done. He then picked up the bear and decided to lay it in the camp house door, but finding the door seemingly closed and latched on the inside he lent over and poked against the door with the bear's nose. To his surprise the door was not latched and swung partly back on its wooden hinges. He then

dropped the bear with its head and fore feet resting inside on the floor and its hind parts resting on a big block used as a step in getting into or out of the house.

Pap then peeped inside the door to see if Bud and Dave were inside. To his surprise he saw they were both in their bunks with all blankets pulled up over their heads. He now decided to have a little innocent fun. He then grunted like a wounded bear and scratched on the floor with one hand and listened. He then peeped through a crack in the door to see if Bud and Dave were responding. Both had stuck their heads from under the blankets and were looking toward the door. The light in the fireplace was now real dim. After they had gotten their eyes better adjusted to the partially darkened room, Pap shook the bear's head and scratched on the floor again with his fingers.

This was enough, and too much. Bud and Dave kicked off the blankets and in about two jumps cleared the back door yelling to Sarge as they went: "Pap wounded a big bear. It's killed him and trailed us to the door. Get out of here or you will be killed too." About the time Bud and Dave had cleared the back door; Sarge rolled from his bunk and followed them. Pap said later he ran around the house just in time to see Sarge clear the back yard fence by at least two feet. Pap said he called to the fleeing man to stop. Because of the appearance in the back yard of a tall white ghost at which Ruff and Ready were barking loud and fierce and prevented any one of the frightened men from hearing him.

As Pap stood there laughing about how easy it had been to have a little innocent fun with a dead bear, he heard Cook coming up the trail from the spring. He waited for Cook to arrive. At the backyard fence Cook stopped and while still holding both buckets of water began telling in great excitement about just seeing a tall snow white ghost, fifteen or twenty feet tall, chase two oxen off through the woods south of the spring. He said he could not tell which two oxen were gone, but thought it was two of the biggest one judging from the noise they made in trying to outrun that tall ghost. Here Cook paused for breath, but before Pap could say a word, Cook continued to tell about how easy the tall ghost moved along without touching the ground, or only occasionally, just sort of floating through the air but was gaining on them oxen even if they were scared nearly to death. Here Cook stopped again to catch his breath and Pap asked him how far the oxen and ghost were when he last saw them. He said: "They were two hundred yards south of the spring and still going, I could see only glimpses of the ghost but could hear the big oxen. They're plum gone by now. Those oxen and ghost are. You should have seen them and heard them running."

By this time Pap helped Cook over the fence with his buckets of water and told him what had happened. To convince him, Pap showed him the dead bear still lying with its head and fore paws in the door and its hind parts resting on the door step block. Pap also showed him the three empty bunks and the blankets scattered over the floor between the bunks and back door. "Plenty of proof," he said.

Pap and Cook then took the bear out in the yard under a tree where it could be hung up for skinning and dressing. A close examination showed the bear to be a young one weighing approximately a hundred pounds gross weight. A bright fire was kindled in the

yard by which the men worked in dressing the bear. They were quite a while in dressing the bear, cutting up the meat and salting it, because they spent much time laughing about Cook's great excitement in reporting to Pap about two big oxen being chased off by a tall ghost that was traveling with so much ease as proof that it was a real ghost and not a fairy tale. Then too, some time was spent in trying to figure out what would happen to Bud and Dave when they looked back and saw the great tall snow white ghost just wafting along like something floating in the air. They wondered if they would run until completely exhausted, or until they "busted" their heads against a tree.

Just about the time the meat was salted and tucked away for the night, up walked the three frightened men, not as badly worn as Pap and Cook had expected to see them, if they ever saw them at all.

Bud and Dave admitted they had run at first to get out reach of what they thought was a wounded bear trying to get in at the camp door. They said: "We could see its head and ears struggling in the door and could hear its claws scratching to get in. We thought it had killed Pap and trailed us. Shucks, we just had to save ourselves the best way we could. It shore was a dangerous looking thing struggling at the door." They admitted they had run at first to get away from the wounded bear, but when they looked back just after climbing hurriedly over the fence and saw what looked like a 10 or 15 foot ghost coming straight through the air at them, they had to run. Dave said, "Its long white robe was stretched out far behind and popping sort of like a sheet on a clothes line in a storm. It looked scary, that ghost did. It was a scary devil ghost if ever one was seen. My feet just couldn't stay on the ground. Bud's couldn't either. He was scared too, Bud was." Then Dave stopped to catch his breath and Bud began, "Dave, he's right, it shore did look scary, that ghost did. Dave took the lead, and I shore had to run to keep up too. I never could a kept up but that ghost was right behind me. It was running so light, that ghost was, until I couldn't hear it. So I looked back a little with one eye over my shoulder thinking it had stopped and there it was, right at me with long arms reaching out. I sort of grunted and told Dave to get out of my way. He picked up speed then, Dave did. I reckon we'd a been running yet but Dave got excited and forgot to look where he was running and stepped in a big deep stump hole and somersaulted three or four times and I tumbled on to him a fore he quit tumbling too." Bud paused for breath. Dave said, "That's right, and where we scuffled around trying to get up, Sarge he told us to quit running, the bear was left a mile back in the woods."

The three men really enjoyed the razzing and joking they had brought upon themselves because of Pap's innocent prank. However, they never did think much of Cook's report about having seen two big oxen chased off through the woods by a tall ghost traveling so light and easy as proof it was a real ghost and not a fairy tale.

They claimed Cook, when in the dark, was always looking for strange objects and listening for strange sounds and making out like they were bigger and stranger than they were. They described him with a phrase they had learned from one of Pap's detective stories, "Mistaken Identity." They claim this was a clear case of Cook's mistaken identity.

“Yes,” said Pap, “The same sort of mistaken identity that mistook a few grunts and groans from a wounded cub bear as a signal to “Hit the bunk,” without undressing, even taking off dirty shoes, and get under the cover head and ears; the same kind that makes men mistake a little scratching on a dry board by a man’s hand for clawing on a wall by a big bear’s claw; the same kind that made three men take a nod of a dead bear cub’s head as a signal for a three mile race”

Just at this time Pap stopped to sample his bedtime can of hot coffee and suggested that each member of the camp crew take a few swallows direct from the can as a LIBATION to the memory of this River Road Camp incident and gave it the title: MISTAKEN IDENTITY.

Pap then passed his can of hot coffee to each member of the crew who then drank from it the LIBATION in silent solemnity. When the last man had finished, the can was handed back to Pap who drank three swallows and gave this toast.

Here’s a fond memory to the near tragedy tonight
May we stay young and always keep its memories bright
Here’s a thanks for our MISTAKEN IDENTITY
May the jolly crew keep this same propensity,
And good night.

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Brave Man's Accident

During the past three or four weeks a man had visited the camp twice during each weekend and had managed to knock down a huge paunch full of log camp rations each visit. It was a custom, or probably an unwritten law, among logging camps and pioneer homes to feed any visiting strangers who happened to be at camps or homes at meal time. On this man's first visit he walked up Friday night just as the men were preparing to eat supper. He, being a stranger, according to southern piney woods hospitality, was invited to share camp rations. Some members of the crew jokingly asked him if he wasn't afraid to be strolling around in these woods alone at night lest he might meet a hungry bear of a panther. His reply was given substantially in these words: "No, Brave Man is my first, last and only name. My parents gave me another name when I was young, but long before I was grown, because of my unusual courage and bravery, all who knew me called me Brave Man. Since a boy that's the only name I have." Hence, this man was known to the camp only as Brave Man.

By the time supper was over, Brave Man had eaten all of the cooked rations including cold bread, cold sweet potatoes and an extra pitcher of syrup. The crew had learned that Brave Man was a squatter sojourning three of four miles down the river having taken up in an old abandoned cabin on no-man's land. It was also learned that he was employed at this time approximately five miles up the river from the camp as a timber chopper and was on his way home for the weekend. Soon after supper Brave Man took his departure in the darkness.

Sunday evening about sunset Brave Man walked up and waited around the feed lot until the men came in for supper. He walked in the same as if he had been a regular member of the crew. After consuming, as Cook later said, "A full peck of solid rations" he continued his journey back to where he was employed. After he left, his braggadocios manner was the subject under discussion until bedtime. Not a single member of the camp crew liked his manner and Cook was disgusted with the capacity of his appetite.

The next weekend Brave Man did not come for supper until Saturday evening. For some unknown reason he was a day late. Cook and Pap were the only men at the camp for supper Saturday. Brave Man came in for supper along with Pap exactly like he did the Sunday night before. Soon after supper he continued toward his temporary cabin down the river.

Sunday evening half an hour before sunset, up walked Brave Man and came right on in as if he was a regular employee there. At supper Pap and Sarge purposely had a discussion about several very dangerous bears and panthers seen around the edges of the river swamp. They understood that several hogs had been eaten and their skeletons later found. Half a dozen yearlings had mysteriously disappeared and it was thought they had been devoured by these same fierce animals. And too they had heard that two men had been chased enroute home one night last week. Brave Man had heard the remarks but had been too busy eating to take part or to show much interest.

When supper was over Brave Man asked if these killings by panthers and bears were up the river from this camp or down the river. Pap looked wise as if trying to give a correct answer and finally replied that he thought the hogs were killed by a bear above the camp and the yearlings just below the camp by a pack of panthers. Pap then said: “Brave Man, you know panthers are more cold-blooded than bears. Panthers never chase their kill or give it any warning. They conceal themselves on low overhanging boughs or slanting trees over trails and roads and wait for hogs, yearlings or people to pass under them. When the object of their attack is directly under them they will let out a horrifying yowl and spring upon the animal or person and cut its throat with sharp tusks almost as soon as it lands, giving its victims not a single chance of escape.” Then Pap, in a serious manner, suggested to Brave Man to be careful in passing under low overhanging boughs or slanting trees in his traveling up and down the old River Road. Then he said in a whisper, “You know it leads right around the fringes of all the big thick swamps and marshy hide-outs for these fierce animals. It’s a dangerous place, this road is.”

When Pap had finished his whispering, Brave Man looked up and said: “Shucks, didn’t I tell you my name’s Brave Man and nothing else? I’m not afraid.” Then he looked straight at the approaching darkness and said, “Thank you, I’m not afraid, but I’ll think about what you said.” Brave Man now stepped out into the dark to walk this road all alone for five miles.

After Brave Man had left, Pap explained what he had said to him as a sort of preparation for what would be told to him the next time he comes along here on a Friday evening and stays until after dark. He then admonished the men not to let a wheel slip and we’ll have a lot of fun and help him a lot too. Pap then called the men’s attention to Brave Man’s remarks, “Thank you, I’m not afraid but I’ll think about what you said.” Said he, “A brave braggadocios of his type will think about panthers and their habit of jumping from overhanging boughs and killing their victims without warning and without a shadow of a chance to fight or escape until he will be running for miles every time a limb shakes over his head. It’s a slipping, his bravery is. No doubt about it.”

The following Saturday Cook gave the men supper about 4:00 o’clock in the afternoon and closed up the camp. He and Pap then went strolling along the edges of the swamp and hammocks hoping to kill a turkey or scare up a flock and return before day Sunday morning and maybe kill one. Hence no one saw Brave Man. A short time before feed time for the oxen Sunday afternoon Brave Man strolled up and stood around the feed lot until the men went to supper. As was Brave Man’s habit, he walked in at supper for his peck of solid rations. Dave and Sarge were looking at Pap as if expecting him to bring up the subject of panthers. However, panthers were not mentioned. Pap was waiting for Brave Man to bring up the subject. He thought the seed sown a week before should be about ready to germinate.

When supper was over, Pap lingered close around Brave Man but said nothing. Though he could see Brave Man was anxious to say something, he did not want the other men to hear. As the other men began a conversation among themselves Brave Man moved a little

closer to Pap and began substantially as follows: “You know I’ve been thinking about what you said about the way panthers attack yearlings and people without giving them a chance to fight or run. That’s dangerous, them cowardly attacks are. You know I’m not afraid. You know I’m brave too. Nothing scares me but what’s the use for a fellow to be brave if he’s to be killed without having a chance to fight or run?” Pap made no reply but waited for further comment. Brave Man then continued, “ Last week I saw several low overhanging limbs over that old road that would be good places for them big cats to wait for a yearling or a man to come along to be jumped on.”

At this point Sarge sauntered up close by and Pap took advantage of his presence to change the conversation. With an air of seriousness he touched Brave Man on the shoulder and whispered, “It might pay to be careful.” Pap then started a conversation with Sarge and Bud. Brave Man now announced that he would be on his way up the road and departed. As soon as Brave Man was beyond hearing distance, Pap explained to the camp crew that the seed sown last week had germinated and the plants were growing normally. Then he informed them that Brave Man had been looking closely at low over hanging limbs along the road and observed what splendid places they would be for them big cats to hide and drop down on an unsuspecting man or an innocent yearling. Pap then gave it as his opinion that the Brave Braggadocios Man will be in perfect shape by next Friday evening for hearing additional information that will forever cure his self-delusion of his own courage and bravery and return him to mother earth where he will be glad to accept the name given him by his parents. Then said Pap: “If he’s here for supper next Friday we’ll give him the additional information.”

The next Friday, a short while before sunset, up walked Brave Man as proud as a strutting peacock. He strutted around the feed lot speaking boastfully to Bud and Sarge of his experiences in driving large logging teams of oxen. When the feeding was over he strutted up to the supper table as proudly as if owned the world and all things therein, and ate his usual peck of solid rations plus an extra skillet of biscuits and a pitcher of Louisiana molasses. After supper was over, Brave Man chatted with the men a few minutes still in high spirits. Incidentally or otherwise, he asked Sarge if he had been in the late war. When Sarge, who was proud of his record in the army as sergeant of his company, mentioned this fact, Brave Man took the entire conversation without even a feeler nibble. For ten minutes he paraded before the men his war record of bravery and bull dog courage, in battle and out of battle. He had won many skirmishes single handed. Dave and Sarge scotched just enough to keep the parade rolling. When the parade rolled out and the conversation lagged, Brave Man looked toward the door and at his bundles beside it as if he would be on his way home. He then put on his hat, picked up his bundles, and hesitated.

Pap had been listening attentively and closely observing Brave Man’s appearance. He thought he saw Brave Man’s braggadocios look change to one of fear as he stared through the open door into the darkness. Pap now got up and moved near the man and began talking to him in low tones congratulating him on being a brave, courageous soldier in the army but informed him such bravery and courage may mean nothing if a huge panther should attack by jumping from a leaning tree or overhanging bough and cut

his throat without giving him a chance to fight or run for his life. Pap then stepped out into the yard and Brave Man followed. Pap then placed his hand on Brave Man's shoulder and walked with him to the low fence surrounding the cabin. As Brave Man climbed over it, Pap whispered, "Friend, do be careful tonight, watch your steps, danger may be waiting down the road for you."

As Pap returned to the cabin he and Dave grabbed some buckets and rushed off for some water. Cook continued his dish washing. Bud and Sarge looked on and talked about how slick the rain this afternoon had made the log roads and wondered if Brave Man would have a hard time walking in the dark down that slippery road. Within 20 minutes Dave and Pap returned almost out of breath and began complaining about that steep hill and bluff. They sat down so they could breathe better.

About this time the dogs began barking. They heard a noise like a running horse. Then it sounded like a wagon had bumped into the yard fence. The men jumped up and started to look through the open door but before reaching it Brave Man tumbled in and lay prostrate on the floor gasping for breath. The men gathered around him.

Cook, who was now washing pots, took his pan and pot rag and began washing from Brave Man's face what he thought was blood, but which later, because of mistaken identity, turned out to be mud from a red clay hill 300 yards down the road and plug chewing tobacco juice. Pap grabbed his coffee can from its corner on the hearth and began to make some hot coffee for the poor, bloody, miserable, exhausted man. Sarge and Dave had set the man up on the floor for the convenience of Cook in washing his face. In doing this they had found his clothes wet and as muddy as was his face before Cook's work with this pot rag. By this time the fire on the hearth was burning real bright. Bud, Dave and Sarge moved the wet man near the fire to dry his clothing. Pap soon handed him a large cup of smoking hot black coffee. After drinking it the man admitted that he felt better. Soon he was standing around the fire trying to dry his clothes and was able to talk.

The fellow was not bombarded with questions about what had happened to cause him to tumble into the camp in such a condition. His accident as he called it was related substantially as follows:

"I was moseying along down the River Road with a bundle under each arm near the thick woods beside the head of a small hollow, maybe containing a spring, when I noticed some low overhanging limbs reaching all the way across the road. At first I thought nothing about the limbs and kept moseying along, but just before getting under them something, Providence, I reckon, caused me to stop for a few seconds. Just as I was about to take the next step the biggest panther I ever heard, or saw, let out the most awful squall I ever heard. I turned and ran as soon as I could get my feet to move, and that was pretty quick. Just as I had made a couple of steps, the big monster jumped from the limbs. It must have got caught some way in the grape vines growing on the limbs because the limbs shook awful. Then the big panther landed almost on my back, just a little to one side. I know from the way it hit the ground it didn't land on its feet. Just as it landed,

before the limb and vines, those wild fox grape vines, quit shaking another scary squall was let out."

Here Brave Man hesitated a few seconds for breath. The said: "Again I reckon Providence put that wild fox grape vine there to tangle that blood thirsty animal and make him miss me. It must have been." He then continued, "By the time the sound of this squall was over, by bundles had been dropped and I was knocked down at a curve in the road against some small trees close by the curve. I reckon I looked back to see it the old cat had stopped to eat the meat or was still coming after me. I must have missed the road. Anyway, I was knocked flat and began praying and prayed until I got crawled back into the road and was running. Don't know how long it was but it seemed a long time. I thought sure the old cat would pounce on me before I could get up. Just as I started running I thought I heard him tearing the paper off the ten pound round of pork I had just dropped. You know I've heard old people say all them kind of animals, when chasing a fellow, would stop and eat any meat dropped and give a fellow time to get away. Reckon that's why I dropped the meat. Well, when I got straightened out in the road I really did some running to get here before the panther ate that pork and overtook me. Coming down that hill where that chalky looking stuff makes it slick, I got to slipping and slipped and fell until I landed in the big log cart ruts at the bottom of the hollow. There I tumbled completely down and got wet and muddy. After getting out of them deep log cart ruts I was so tired until I just couldn't run fast any more. Just did the best I could until I struck that fence out there and knocked it down as I fell over it." Here he stopped talking for more breath.

Sarge asked him if his hat was lost. Brave Man admitted he didn't know, though it might have been knocked off by the panther when it jumped at him, or when he was knocked down by the trees or it might have been lost in the deep log cart ruts. The men expressed sympathy and admitted that he must have had a narrow escape. This wound him up again. He began by asking the men to get good light, their guns and dogs and go back with him and let him show them where his accident occurred and the huge tracks the fierce animal made in that soft camp sand where it landed almost on him, and would have landed right on him had it not got tangled in that mass of vines on the limb. Then Bud added, "And hunt your hat and bundles?" Brave Man added: "We may get my green coffee, tobacco and soap but not the pork. He's eaten it before now, that cat has."

The men, armed with a big torch light, two axes and two shot guns, accompanied Brave Man to the scene of his accident. Of course Pap and Cook led Ruff and Ready to pick up the trail and chase the panther up a tree where it could be shot. Brave Man led the way. Soon he asked for the torch. Instead of handing it to him, Bud gave him two or three lighted splinters and several unlighted ones. Soon Brave Man had a bright light. He searched in the log cart ruts in the hollow for his hat. The hat was not to be seen but the tracks made by his shoes and the prints of his hands were plenty visible for ten feet on either side of the deep ruts. Then Dave dragged his ax along the rut under the water and located the hat. It was carried to a clear pool and the mud rinsed off it.

The road was examined for tracks from here on but none were found that had been made since the rain except those made by Brave Man as he moseyed along down the road or as he ran back up it. The men noticed the moseying along tracks were from 24 to 30 inches apart while the others were from 7 to 10 feet apart. Soon they came to the cluster of small trees into which Brave Man had run and been knocked backwards to the ground. After Brave Man had pointed out the trees that really knocked him down and his scuffling spot, Pap dubbed it the "Praying Station." Brave Man admitted here he promised the Lord if he was saved from this awful accident he would never again walk this River Road alone at night.

Brave Man was then asked to show where his bundles were dropped. He led the way while the men readied their guns for quick action in the event the panther was still gnawing on the pork. The other bundle was found unharmed. No tracks were near it except those made by the man who had dropped it there twenty minutes before. Brave Man then said, "That's my soap, coffee and tobacco. He couldn't eat it, that panther couldn't." Then he added, "I knew I herd him tearing that paper off of that pork, I knew it would be gone. That's what saved me." Still no tracks were located. Brave Man was then asked to point out the place where he was certain he saw the big panther, so Ruff and Ready could be placed right on the trail and let loose for the chase. Slowly along the road Brave Man crept, followed by the other five. All the men were straining their eyes looking for huge panther tracks. When they were within approximately twenty feet of the overhanging limbs, they saw a small gray and white house kitten sitting beside Brave Man's round of pork, gently chewing on one corner of the bundle. Immediately it was recognized as a little four months old kitten brought to the camp a week or so ago by Bud to assist in keeping rats and mice away from the camp. The poor kitty had been chased off by Cook's dogs one day when he let them out for a little exercise. Still no tracks were found except Brave Man's. Bud picked up the starving kitten and carried it back to camp. Brave Man picked up his round of pork and carried it back to camp. On the way back to camp few words were spoken. The men were disappointed at not finding the tracks of the huge panther so plainly seen and heard. Said Sarge, "It's a pity we didn't find the tracks so we could have had a great race and caught the cat." Bud, who seldom offered any comment, raised his kitty and said: "What do you mean? Here's the huge cat." This remark provoked a light laugh from all of the camp, except Brave Man, who was now beginning to wilt.

That night Brave Man was provided a pallet to sleep log camp fashion in front of the hearth where he could turn and dry and nap a little between turns.

At 4:00 a.m. the next morning when Cook kindled a fire to start breakfast Brave Man got up. He stood around the fire a few minutes until the drivers went out to feed and yoke their teams. Shortly after that he walked out as if to join the men at the feed lot. He did not come in to breakfast with the men. A little search made by Cook revealed his bundles were gone. This was sprung by Cook at breakfast as the "Good News." "The trick worked," said all in unison.

Ten days later rumors were picked up that Brave Man repaired his two-wheel cart on Saturday and penned his pair of range yearlings. Sunday morning during the cool of the day the man whose first, last and only name was BRAVE MAN, spelled with all capitals, headed his yearlings toward the west where brave men in those days were appreciated.

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The Uncookable Beans

The incident related here did not occur at the River Road Camp but eight or ten miles up Big Escambia Creek from it's junction with the Escambia River two miles below where the Florida and Alabama state line crosses the Conecuh River. It is related because Cook was serving his apprenticeship as a cook in this camp for a crew driving logs way up Big Escambia Creek to the McMillian Mill Company's saw mill down on the Escambia River where Pine Barren Creek flows into the river. And too, it is related because it is a perfect illustration of the uncookability of some of the beans placed on the market when they first became the chief dish at all pioneer logging and timber camps. This was true of all camps whether they contained haulers, choppers and hewers in the timber woods, river rafting hands or log driving crews upon the creeks and rivers.

Log driving camps were during the early pioneer days a sort of peripatetic institution, moving from one to six times each week as the tail end of the log drive moved down stream. The camp tents, cooking pots and pans and a meager supply of groceries were moved on what was called in log drive parlance a "Billy." Not a billy goat, however. The billy used here was made by fastening together a few big high floating logs in what was called a clamp or block. Poles were then placed in the depressions between the logs, and the billy covered with a thick layer of pine straw. Usually a small tent was set up on the billy to protect bedding and groceries from rain. The billy was tied up at convenient places along the stream as near as possible to the tail end of the drive.

The crew of seven men and the foreman came in one day at noon for dinner while the billy was tied up near the Allen Moye Bluff log and timber landing near the mouth of Cow Pen Creek on Big Escambia Creek. All during the forenoon the men had been straining and tussling with a jamb of logs piled high during a recent flood in the stream. It had been found necessary to rig up a Spanish Jack to pull some of the key logs from the lower end of the jamb in order to break it. The men were no doubt more tired and hungry than usual because of this extra strenuous work. They found the main dish for dinner to be a big pan of navy beans well seasoned with an amply supply of smoked bacon. Plain white beans were then known as navy beans.

The hungry crew seated themselves around the improvised table and helped [served] their big tin plates copiously with beans and bacon from the big smoking hot pans. As soon as they began chewing the first taste of beans they burst into an uproar of complaints about the beans. They swore until the place seemed to emit fumes of the proverbial sulfur and brimstone. Each man took his turn in expressing his idea of the beans. While each had a little different version of complaints, all agreed upon one thing, namely: "That the beans were as hard as buckshot."

Cook came to the table in surprise trying to explain the beans surely must be cooked well because they had been cooking more than three hours over a hot pine knot fire. The men refused to believe a word he said. Cook was accused of having spent the morning sleeping in the camp or prowling up and down the creek searching for a good fishing

hole, hunting coon tracks or a possum hide-out. Then he was accused of being too confounded lazy to bring to camp wood enough to boil the bean pot. Cook sensed the situation and offered no further explanations. He observed that the men were tired, hungry and in no mood to discuss the matter. Cook then picked up a spoon and tasted the beans. He too found them as hard as buckshot. He admitted he was surprised, humiliated and chagrinned, whatever that meant. [He admitted that he had just read it in a book] He then tried to apologize for the hard beans.

Then men refused to pay any attention to his remarks. They wouldn't believe his story. They continued to accuse him of sleeping all the morning or just prowling around in the woods. One man noticed the bacon with the beans was well cooked. "Perfectly tender," said he, "It is plain to me that Cook put the meat in to boil a little before putting the beans in the pot. He forgot to put the beans in until almost dinner time." "Yes" replied a worker, "He forgot it because he was a mile or two up the creek looking for an old raccoon's feeding grounds." Others thought he had been hunting a turkey roosting place, or a slough containing frogs and tadpoles where coons go for feeding. However, all were certain that the beans had not been put into the pot until almost noon. Cook took the abuse quietly because he knew the men were in no good mood for arguing about the beans that were as hard as buckshot.

The hungry men filled up on biscuits, bacon, molasses and black coffee and went back to work. As they left the camp, Cook had a request from the foreman to "Tie Up" his prowling during the afternoon and cook the beans so the men could eat them for supper. Several of the men chimed in, in log driving parlance of smoking sulfur and brimstone fumes, wanting that pot of blankety blank beans cooked and not maybe. Cook again sensed the situation and made no reply.

Before eating any dinner himself he went off to the nearby woods and brought a supply of pine knots and put the bean pot to boiling. This was kept up during the long spring afternoon. About three in the afternoon Cook tasted the beans. They were as hard as buckshot. He filled the pot with water and added more knots to the fire. Black smoke rose and drifted off over the creek like a house was burning. The beans boiled and sputtered. About four in the afternoon the beans were again tasted. They were yet as hard as buckshot. Cook again refilled the pot with water and piled on more knots. Cook now became dubious about those beans being tender for supper. While he kept the beans boiling and sputtering he prepared other things for supper. About sunset the men came in and found a steaming hot supper on the table but no beans there. They were surprised at not finding the beans there. That started the conversation. Some of the men demanded an explanation about why the blankety blank beans were not tender and on the table.

Poor Cook began to explain that he had boiled the beans all the afternoon and they are yet as hard as buckshot. He explained that when he saw that they would not be tender in time for supper he had prepared other things for supper. He then offered the men a taste of some of the beans he had taken out of the pot just before supper to taste and to see for themselves if the beans were still as hard as buckshot. As soon as each had tasted, each allowed the beans are yet as hard as buckshot. As the men continued helping themselves

to the best supper within the past several days they began to razz Cook about his possum hide-outs and coon tracks. They wanted to know when they could have another coon hunt. They wanted to know about that latest turkey roost he had located and that a baked turkey would make a good dinner. They joking and razzing about the beans as hard as buckshot continued for quite a while.

When the men had eaten about all they could hold, Cook pulled a little surprise by lifting from his old bake oven a huge cake of his famous gingerbread. He carved it camp fashion, in hunks instead of slices. This called for another cup of hot coffee. While nibbling the gingerbread and sipping the hot coffee everybody became as jovial as a crew of logging workers at a Christmas party. Pretty soon Cook passed around the second hunk from his big gingerbread cake. This called for another cup of hot coffee. This prolonged the nibbling and sopping a long time.

While every member of the crew, the foreman and even Cook, were in a jovial condition one worker started a conversation about a jug of joy water as good as swamp whiskey and sometimes better. Immediately Cook took advantage of the opportunity he had been waiting for. He pointed at the big pile of fat pine knots he had brought to the camp for the night fires and offered to treat the crew to a little brown half gallon jug full of good swamp whiskey if the crew would boil that pot of beans tender by late bedtime. Without a word of discussion the offer was accepted and some of the men began piling pine knots on the hot coals around the pot. Others filled the pot with water to prevent scorching.

Like old King Nebuchadnezzar the old pot was heated “One seven times more than it was wont to be heated,” to remove all doubts about getting the little brown jug of joy water, and to prove to Cook that he had not made an honest effort to cook that pot of beans tender. As the fire burned whorls of black smoke raised spiraling high above the tops of the tall trees close beside the camp. The pot boiled and the beans sputtered and bubbled as pent up steam escaped. More water was added to the beans and more fat pine knots stacked around the old bean pot in a determined effort to cook the beans so they would not be as hard as buckshot. The pot continued to boil hard. Great volumes of black smoke continued to rise and waft off over the creek. This continued for two hours as more water was poured into the pot to prevent the beans from scorching as more fat pine knots were stacked close around the pot. As the night air became heavier the smoke ceased to rise in spirals and just wafted off away from the creek.

Like old King Nebuchadnezzar, who had the old furnace heated “One seven times more than it was wont to be heated,” to roast the three Hebrews, the crew all agreed that the old bean pot must be heated seven times hotter than Cook had ever heated it. If this could be done, surely they would get the little brown jug with a half gallon of that wonderful JOY WATER. And too, they would convince Cook that he had not tried to cook the beans softer than as hard as buckshot. Cook sat quietly as he saw all of his big pile of firewood consumed. Like the three Hebrews who sat quietly as they watched the furnace being heated “One seven times more than it was wont to be heated,” to roast them, Cook sat quietly and watched his firewood waft off in smoke. His mind was wondering if heating the old pot “One seven times more than it was wont to be heated,” would really win the

little brown jug of Joy Water. As the men razzed him about his foolish offer all they could get out of him was, “Well, it will be worth it to know that pot of beans can be cooked other than as hard as buckshot.”

The men quoted to him the well know phrase, “Come easy, go easy,” and promised to illustrate the truth of this by drinking the two quarts of Joy Water at bedtime to celebrate the victory of convincing him of his own laziness and of his lying and maybe both. Cook took the razzing with splendid good humor. Like the three Hebrews, he refused to be disturbed. He did however express a little interest about the loss of his big pile of fuel. And too, he showed some concern about seeing the old faithful bean pot heated “One seven times more than it was wont to be heated.”

At ten, the camp bedtime, the firing stopped. The old pot was cooled down a little. Soon a few beans were dipped from the big bean pot and left in a big shallow pan to cool a little before the men tasted them. It was agreed that no one would give an opinion about the beans until each man had tasted. As soon as the last of the seven men had tasted the beans, the foreman was to call for each man to give his opinion at the drop of a hat. At the drop of the hat, seven log drivers yelled in unison, “Those d--- beans are yet as hard as buckshot,” and walked around a friendly camp fire to shake hands with Cook and tell him the he’s not lazy and hadn’t lied.

All the thoughts of a bedtime celebration by drinking that little brown jug of Joy Water vanished, faster than the black smoke had spiraled off over the creek.

The camp foreman then requested that Cook pour that pot of beans into the creek while they were still hot, lest in cooling they changed to cast iron bullets and welded themselves to the pot. This was done post haste to save the pot.

Everyone thought this was the end of the pot of uncookable beans. Yea, this was not so. These beans drifted off down the creek, some of them even drifted into the Escambia River. They washed up on every sandbar from the Allen Moye log and timber landing on Big Escambia Creek to its mouth and on every sandbar in the Escambia River from the mouth of the creek to the Ferry Pass at the head of Escambia Bay and produced a bumper crop of nice tender beans. “Yea, plenty,” said the crew, “To supply our camp during the next season and all river hands running rafts of pine logs, cypress logs and square timber, both hewn and sawn.” Even the crew of the old government snag boat plying up and down the river often times feasted on this delicious crop.

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A Happy House Warming

About the first of November, 1868, it became evident that a member of the large group of families related to Uncle Gabe Capers, sometimes called Grandpa Gage, would complete a large new log house just before Christmas, approximately five miles from the camp way-down on Goblin Creek, later known as the McCaskill Mill Creek. This cabin was built according to the usual plan for such cabins in the community. The main room was approximately 20 feet wide and 32 feet long with an open porch on the front side and a closed one on the back side. Instead of using puncheon flooring in this house it was floored with wide planking sawed in an upright saw mill. Such planks often varied as much as half an inch in thickness, thus making the floor uneven. These planks were also full of short splinters made by the rough upright saws in use in the early pioneer days. Almost all such lumber was cut as rough-edge boards in squaring timber.

Usually the big room had a door on either side about the middle of the long side walls, a large fireplace in one end with a small window on one side having a sliding wooden shutter, and a window in the other end also having a sliding wooden shutter. The cracks between the logs were sealed over with long split boards made smooth by "drawing" them with a large drawing knife. The over-head ceiling was usually wide rough-edge boards laid on overhead joists. The chimneys for such houses were usually what were called "Stick and Dirt" chimneys. The hearths were often made of rock and the back sides of the fireplace lined with rock approximately three feet from the hearth. The roof on such buildings was made of boards two or three feet long, split from large yellow pine trees.

It long had been a custom in pioneer communities in this area that when a large cabin was erected the owner would give his neighbors a community dance in the big room before any partition wall or walls were built or furniture placed. Such dances were called "House Warmings" and were given to the neighbors as a friendly gesture for lending a helping hand at the "House Raising."

The relatives and friends of Uncle Gabe, whose leadership had long been well recognized among his family connections, after much pleading and persuading obtained his permission to have the customary house warming just before the family moved into this new house. This pleading and persuading with Uncle Gabe had become necessary since he had become an old time shouting Methodist and a leader at the Methodist Mission Station in his community and a few members had been "Turned out" for dancing the "Square Dance." He had given his permission after getting a solemn promise from each of his relatives who was a member of the Methodist Church not to dance at the party.

As the big cabin neared completion the Christmas spirit began to bubble over and the preparations for the house warming began to spread over the community. Soon the news leaked out that Grandpa Gabe had not only given his permission but his blessing also and was taking part in the preparation. He had not agreed to dance but had consented to "Banjo" for the old time fiddlers who would play for the house warming. He had

prepared his big broom sage straws and had them a-seasoning for use in beating perfect time on the fiddle strings as the fiddler played the old time breakdown tunes such as “Arkansas Traveler,” “Fire In The Mountains,” and “Turkey In The Straw.” This was good news to all of the younger generation and was really adding pep to the preparations.

The next important news to be circulated by the committee on arrangements as appointed by Grandpa Gabe was that the women of the community will make and bring to the house warming plenty of big sponge cakes, pound cakes, frosted cakes and high storied layer cakes and the Grandpa Gabe will supervise the making of two big wash-pots full of strong coffee to be served with the cake at midnight to pep the dancers up for the remaining three hours of enthusiastic celebration. Grandpa Gabe was to parch and grind the coffee according to his formula so as to get the right flavor.

The next thing anybody knew, the women, young and old, married and single, were making and fitting themselves with new gay colored calico dresses trimmed with silken ribbons and fancy laces to wear to the house warming. Some bought new dancing shoes at the commissary to be christened and perhaps have the soles ripped off on the uneven floors. Those who found it inconvenient to purchase new dancing shoes had old one half-soled and made strong for the occasion.

As has always been the case, when the women begin to make preparations for primping and dressing up a little, the thing spreads like measles in a country school. The men also catch the “Primping Up” fever. The married women first begin to get out their husband’s and son’s best Sunday suits. They were dusted, sunned, loose buttons re-sewed, necessary darning done, cleaned and pressed until they look like brand new ones, fresh from the commissary. Old shoes were repaired and made ready for the stubs they would get on the rough, splintery and uneven floor. If they showed evidence of weakness, a new pair was ordered from the commissary.

Dave, who went home each weekend down on Goblin Creek in Grandpa Gabe’s community, kept the River Road Camp informed of the progress being make on the new house and of the plans being made for the house warming to be had just before the beginning of the Christmas holidays. The enthusiasm took the men in the camp like small pox takes an army. The camp crew discussed the house warming every night from the beginning of supper until the last man was sound asleep. When it was learned that the date for the house warming was set for the Friday night before Christmas, upon the invitation and urgent request of Dave, the camp crew agreed to attend in a body.

The week before the great occasion, Sarge, Bud and Dave brought back to the camp their Sunday suits, white shirts and all the trimmings. Poor Cook and Pap, who had no wives to dust, darn and otherwise ready their best outfits for the occasion, spent the greater part of the week doing their own dusting, darning, button sewing and otherwise readying their best rigs for the celebration opening the Christmas festivities. Their Sunday suits were washed in a big dishpan, starched with a little camp flour and ironed or pressed with the head of Pap’s big chopping ax. The head of the ax was heated over a bed of coals on the

hearth and then used similar to an old fashion smoothing iron. Their Sunday suits were pressed the same way.

Dave had informed the crew that the dancing would begin at 8:00 p.m., sun-time, and close at 3:00 a.m. Saturday morning with cake and coffee being served at midnight. This would give all working men an hour or a little more to get home and have breakfast in time to get to work at the break of day.

Friday evening Cook had supper waiting for the men before sunset. About sunset the men came in and soon finished eating a big supper. Cook also had a big pot full or hot water for the use of the men in cleaning up for the big party. By 7:00 the men were all dressed and primped up and ready for the five mile walk. They took their slow time on the way, lest they get too warm and spoil all their efforts in dressing and primping up for the party and to keep from being too tired to enjoy swinging the gay colored calico dresses, trimmed with silken ribbons and fancy laces.

At about 8:30 the camp crew arrived without any mishaps. Two hundred yards from the cabin the men stopped for five or ten minutes for a little rest and to do a little last minute primping before entering the dancing hall. They could now hear the music, the fiddle and Uncle Gabe's banjoing with his well seasoned straws, as they came down hard on such tunes as "Sail Away Ladies, Sail," "Fire On The Mountain," "Old Sally Gooden," "Hen Cackle," "Wild Goose," "Arkansan Traveler," and many other familiar "Old Time" fiddle tunes used by early American pioneers to set their feet to shuffling.

All the River Road Camp crew could hear the "Caller" or "Prompter" as he was known in many communities, especially on the other side of the creek, "Partners to their places." "Now Mr. Fiddler put plenty of pep in your music, step it lively and we'll show you how to shake a wicked foot for fun." "All Ready," "Honor your partner," "First couple out," "Swing your partner," "Swing the lady on your right," "Swing right and left all the way around and half way back" "Cut the pigeon wing," and so on to the rapture of the crowd.

After listening to the music and the caller for a few minutes the crew was rested and ready to begin warming the house. The sounds of the music and the call of the dance had rested them.

When the dance was over, which the crew learned was the first set of the evening; Dave introduced each member of the crew to all of the folks he knew as his friends from the River Road Camp. Perhaps the most noted folks among those that the crew met were the Old Time Fiddler and Grandpa Gabe, who was banjoing. They met the ladies in gay colored calico and all its trimmings from the low teens to some well above the sixties. They met logging camp workers from various camps up and down the River Road. These men too represented all ages from the upper teens to beyond the sixties. None were nearly so striking as Grandpa Gabe with his long white hair, long white beard, large head and broad square shoulders. Truly he was one of the great Patriarchs of old.

There seemed to be a scarcity of young men dancers. Pap, Bud and Dave took this as a streak of good luck, meaning of course they would get to dance a few sets too, and get to swing the gay colored calico and its fancy trimmings.

Soon the caller for the dance yelled, “Partners to their places for another dance.” Dave, Cook and Sarge got in the first dance, and seemingly enjoyed it from the beginning. Bud and Pap stood in the corner like wall flowers and looked on during the entire set. During the next set they moved around to another corner and stood beside the musicians. They enjoyed watching Uncle Gabe in all his enthusiasm in banjoing just right, not too low or too loud and always keeping perfect rhythm with the fiddle and the step of the dancers. He also kept perfect rhythm by tapping the toe of one shoe on the floor. Bud and Pat occupied this corner during several sets, enjoying the music probably more than they did the dancing. Those on the floor skipped the fantasy and swung the gay calico with all it trimmings.

Way long toward 11:00 p.m., Dave brought his wife and a good looking widow about Pap’s age over to the fiddler’s corner and introduced them to Bud and Pap and got them into the next set. Bud danced with Dave’s wife and Pap with the widow about his age. Bud and Pap entered into the dancing with the same enthusiasm prevailing around the camp for the past two or three weeks. They really did enjoy the house warming.

When this set was over Grandpa Gabe laid his straws away in the fiddle box with the fiddle and announced that cake and coffee would now be served to everybody at the house-warming, including a double portion for the fiddler, the banjo player and Pap and his widow. This caused a great laugh among the crowd. When the laugh was over everybody moved out in front of the house near two big fire jacks, two big wash-pots full of steaming coffee and a great big rustic table loaded with a variety of big cakes made to eat as well as to look at.

For approximately an hour everybody enjoyed the social hour. The cake was delicious and the aroma and flavor of the coffee delightfully superb. Everyone claimed that this was the happiest house warming ever held in this area of the Winding River Road. During the social hour everybody came around and congratulated and felicitated Grandpa Gabe upon his formula for making the best coffee ever made in this or any other age. They also congratulated the Fiddler and Grandpa Gabe on having furnished the dancers with the best music ever heard by dancers in this or any other age. Then they congratulated the Fiddler, Grandpa Gabe and Pap for making this the jolliest house warming ever held in the valley of the Conecuh and Escambia Rivers from beyond Troy way up in Alabama to the head of the bay at the Ferry Pass and Old Woodbine.

When the crowd had tired of eating cake and sipping Grandpa Gabe’s brand of steaming hot coffee, Grandpa Gabe announced that the crowd would return to the dancing place and continue the “Happy House Warming.” Just as the crowd began moving, a couple of buxom bucks walked up to the Old Time Fiddler and Grandpa Gabe with a little two-quart tin bucket and a regular coffee cup and offered them a sample drink of a new brand of coffee, explaining that it had been made by using three or four different brands to give

it the proper blend and flavored with wild herbs. The Old Time Fiddler and Uncle Gabe liked the new sample very much. The young buxom bucks then filled the coffee cups of the two old musicians with the new drink. They drank it at one gulp and asked for more. At the same time they called their newly made friend, Pap, to bring his cup and taste some new hot coffee. Pap walked over to the group and held his cup for a sample of the new coffee. The young bucks filled the three cups with the new kind of coffee and hurried away. The three drank the new coffee and returned to the dancing room, well pepped up for the rest of the night, especially the musicians.

A new set started. Cook and Sarge were both in it swinging high the gay colored calico and all it trimmings. Soon Cook and his partner danced by Sarge who had noticed Cook's partner was dancing with a noiseless step while Cook was wearing himself to a frazzle trying to dance as light as his partner. Sarge noticed carefully as Cook swung his partner and saw she was dancing in bare feet. Sarge reached over and tapped Cook with one hand and said, "Hello, Cook. Where are your partner's shoes?" Cook looked and saw her bare feet and said, "Where's your shoes?" Cook received this reply, "They're new and skinned my heels. I had to pull them off." Sarge heard the reply and smiled. Cook wilted. This set was over.

Grandpa Gabe was now so full of enthusiasm about the Happy House Warming until he just had to dance a couple of sets for old time's sake. He called his newly made friend Pap to banjo for him and handed over his seasoned straws. Grandpa Gabe soon was in the dance and enjoying it. So was everyone else. Grandpa Gabe now got so happy until he had to shout a little for joy. He danced through three sets before returning to relieve Pap of the banjoing.

In the meantime Cook had been standing on the sidelines since he wilted as he discovered a number of men and women were dancing in bare feet. Among the lot was Sarge's partner, a beautiful, tall, slender blonde and the gayest dressed girl on the floor. Cook made it his special business to get close to Sarge and give him a gentle punch and mention that his dancing partner was not wearing shoes. Before Sarge could see his partner was dancing in bare feet she smiled at Cook and said; "My awkward clumsy old partner stepped on my shoe and ripped off the sole. I had to kick them off in a corner. I've stubbed off one toenail and picked up plenty of splinters." Sarge wilted. Cook was now even. He and Sarge got together and told nothing on each other. Dave picked up the news a few weeks later and brought it to the camp.

The dancing at the Happy House Warming was over at 2:30. The crowd spent the last half hour thanking the host and hostess, the Old Time Fiddler and Uncle Gabe for the party and the splendid music. All the younger set had to thank Grandpa Gabe for letting them have the Happy House Warming and for making it such a success. Then all the folks had to thank all of the committee appointed by Grandpa Gabe and each other upon taking part in the first Christmas festivities of the season. It was a few minutes past 3:00 a.m. when the crowd began to leave for home.

On the way home Dave explained that the new brand of coffee was made by blending some whisky and gin with wild horse mint from the woods, a little sugar and a little hot water, and was passed to The Old Time Fiddler and Grandpa Gabe to get Uncle Gabe jolly enough to dance a few sets so he could not report to the Missionary a number of the younger set for dancing at this house warming and at other dances they knew would be held during the Christmas season without incriminating himself. That's why so many of them thanked him so profusely for making the house warming so jolly and such a delightful occasion.

Pap, the philosopher of the camp, thought the young bucks used good sense along with the horse mint to save the community a useless disturbance later at the Mission Station.

The River Road Camp crew was back at camp by 4:30 a.m., in working clothes and off to work at the break of day, none the worse for wear because of their new experiences and having taken a night out to attend the opening of Christmas festivities at the Happy House Warming.

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River Floods and Freshets

River floods and freshets have been troublesome since the first recorded history and probably since the creation of water and the formation of streams. They still take tolls of human lives by the hundreds every year and destroy property worth many millions of dollars. Science and engineering skills have done much to prevent a lot of this annual loss of life and the destruction of property. Much remains yet to be done. However, science and engineering skills will never be able to solve completely the problem of flood control along the many rivers and creeks and valleys as long as their low flood plains furnish luxuriant pastures for livestock, excel all other lands in the production of the finest food crops for the human race, abundant feed crops for animals and produce great quantities of hardwood timber. Livestock will graze there. Men will work there, build their homes and cities there and die there in an effort to protect their wealth.

The low flood plain adjacent to the Escambia-Conecuh River, four miles from the Diamond Homestead, has an average width of approximately two miles. The flood plain becomes narrower after crossing into Alabama. This plain is exceeding fertile. It has produced millions of the finest hardwood trees and many young cypress trees where the old trees were cut many years ago. It has, and still is supplying, acres of luxuriant pasture for livestock. During the early and middle pioneer days, many acres of the plain were covered with great canebrakes and broad reed marshes. Many other acres supplied grasses that fattened cattle as quickly as the best cultivated clovers and grasses the world over. These same flood plains produced during the pioneer days and still are producing millions of bushels of acorns, various nuts and fruits that fatten hogs as well as the great clover and corn fields of the west. They were equal to the peanuts fields of a later generation.

Once cattle got a taste of this flood plain grazing they would stay with it and would forget about periodic floods and freshets. When hogs had feasted on the native foods produced so abundantly in this flood plain they will never again return to the piney-woods grazing unless driven back by their owners. When the flood waters begin to rise and cover the low land in this plain the cattle and hogs huddle on small areas along the highest ridges and knolls. Such areas are usually located near the banks of the main river or near the banks of deep sloughs flowing through the low plain where sand and sediment are thrown up by boils and whorls during floods and deposited in eddy backwater. On these small knolls and narrow ridges, livestock usually would stand in small huddles until washed away by the swift and rapidly rising flood waters unless driven to safety by their owners.

The tall mother cows and other grown ones would stand on such knolls and ridges until the flood waters would force the calves and yearlings to swim. They would swim around the taller cattle for hours and finally tire out, drown and be washed away by the rising currents. When the rising water became too deep for the grown cattle to continue standing, they would be forced to swim. Usually they would swim to the hill country. Occasionally a few would get tangled in great drifts of trash, limbs and logs, or caught in

masses of thick vines and drown. Sometimes during mid winter the flooding rains would be followed by a sudden drop in temperature and the water would be almost to the freezing point. In such cases if the cattle stood too long in the cold water they might become too numb to swim long distances across the swift currents. In such cases the entire herd would be lost.

Hogs ranging on the low flood plains of the river during flood stage periods would follow the same course as a herd of cattle. The only difference is that they would wash away sooner than the cattle. However, they could endure standing in the cold water longer than the cattle. In rescuing livestock from the rising flood waters, men usually would move the hogs to safety first. It was not uncommon when floods came over-night, so to speak, to find herds of cattle or hogs with all the calves and small yearlings and the pigs and small shoats missing. In such cases they knew the rapidly rising waters had come too quickly and taken its toll before the rescuing parties could reach the livestock.

It was no easy task to bring to safety a herd of 30 or 40 head of hogs of all ages and sizes when found stranded from half a mile to a mile from the hill country. The water never got too cold for hogs to swim long distances to safety. The small pigs could always swim close beside the mother pig, unless they became entangled in large drifts of trash, limbs and treetops. For this reason it was often desirable to catch the small pigs and place them in strong burlap sacks and carry them in a boat to safety. There is little danger of any older hogs getting entangled in drifts or clusters of thick brush and vines. Neither is there danger of any hogs tiring out and drowning. However, it is always desirable for a boat containing two men to follow a herd of hogs to safety because of the danger connected with large drifts that may be lodged across the swimming trails and the probability the swift current occasionally may drive a few of the hindmost swimmers into a thick cluster of brush and wild vines.

It is in many ways more difficult to bring to safety a herd of cattle stranded in flood waters than it is a herd of swine. It also involves greater danger. Cattle become entangled more readily in drifts, brush and vines than hogs. They are also more difficult to get out of such entanglements. They, being larger and heavier than the average range hog, are harder to pull over or sink under a firm drift log against which they may have drifted. If caught in vines or in the forks of brush, they are liable to capsize a rowboat if it is pulled too close to assist in getting them free of such entanglements. If a foot is caught in the fork of a bush or a floating treetop, it is dangerous to take hold of the foot because of the average cow’s ability to kick dangerously hard when excited. Cattle are different from swine in that they sometimes become sullen when swimming long distances, this may happen even before they are exhausted. Hogs never do this. A wit once said when swimming hogs from flood waters: “If a hog dies while swimming, he does so with his head above the water and floats off with his nose above the surface and comes to as soon as his hind feet hits solid earth and he will walk out of the swamp.”

In February or early March when range cattle are in a state of low vitality and have been standing for a long time in water with temperatures almost down to the freezing point, it is dangerous and difficult to undertake to swim them a long distance to safety. When this

is necessary it is desirable to have plenty of good rowboats and skillful men to handle quickly any situation that may arise. Cattle, in such conditions, are already exhausted and nervous before begin driven into swimming water. They soon give out and being to moo, moan, low and cry. Yes, cry piteously, far more so than the agonizing cries of any human in sorrow or distress. When half a dozen cows become frightened and send forth these agonizing distress calls at the same time their sound is gruesome, deafening, and agonizing beyond comparison. It's enough to make strong men faint and drown with the cattle.

Experienced men sense the situation upon hearing the first few cries of distressful moans calling for help. They know such calls must be answered quickly and are usually prepared for any emergencies. If they do not have a sufficient number of ropes handy for use in tying the head of each animal in distress above the surface of the water, the resourceful pioneer can cut vines from a nearby cluster and tie half a dozen heads above the water within three minutes. The ropes or vines are tied around the animal's horns or neck and the head pulled high and the other end of the rope or vine is tied to the nearest tree or overhanging limb. As soon as the head of each animal in distress has been tied above the water, one man holds the heads of three of four animals above the water while another man rows the boat towing the cattle to safety. If plenty of boats and men are available, each boat may make only one tow trip. If only one rowboat is available and several animals have been tied-up, that boat may have to make several tow trips because only about four animals can be carried at a time.

If the weather is extremely cold and the cattle have to remain tied in the water too long they will be unable to stand or walk when landed. In such cases it becomes necessary to build a big log-heap fire or fires around the cattle to warm them.

The experiences of a two day trip on the raging whirling flood waters of the Escambia River in west Florida rescuing range cattle and hogs from the foaming whirling flood waters are given in the next few pages. Such experiences are typical of pioneers residing along the low flood plains of rivers where large herds of livestock are kept and permitted to range on the flood plains. It is also descriptive of early life along other rivers in west Florida and south Alabama during their early history. It was especially true in the low flood plain of the Conecuh River for several miles above its junction with the Escambia River near the state line.

Late in February when I was a hardy 16 or 17 year old log camp worker, the rains began to fall in perfect torrents about the middle of the afternoon and continued until daybreak the next morning. Since the rains came directly from the direction of the head streams of the Escambia-Conecuh River in the vicinity of Union Springs in Alabama, father knew the Escambia River would be a flood stage before noon following the continuous downpour during the afternoon and the entire night. He was up as usual way before day and making preparations to go to the river swamp and get some cattle and hogs from the low flood plain if possible before they were lost in the flood. At this time father was taking care of approximately 100 head of range cattle for his friend Mr. Henry Bray that were probably at this time in the swamp known as "The Cut Off," located between the

main river and the Wily Williams Lake, 12 miles down the river from where his own cattle were ranging in the river swamp.

Father's cattle were ranging in a large field only a mile or so south of the Florida-Alabama state line known as the Chafin-Jernigan Swamp Field. This field had been cultivated a few years ago by father and approximately 20 head of range cattle pastured in the field each winter. For several years after the field ceased to be cultivated and the fences had been destroyed by flood waters these cattle returned each winter because of the fine grazing. Father had at this time approximately 40 head of hogs ranging in the river swamp adjacent to the Gaylor Dead River Log and Timber Landing which had been used by father for several years as the landing place for timber and logs hauled by his logging teams. The cattle belonging to Mr. Bray were known as the Wily Williams cattle and were ranging in the "Cut Off" because they had been raised there by Mr. Williams and sold to Mr. Bray a few years after Mr. Williams became County Tax Collector and moved to Milton, the County Seat.

The fact that the livestock was so widely scattered and father had only one boat available for use in getting the stock from the flood waters was worrying him. Before the rain had ceased to fall, father and I were on the road toward the river at the mouth of Bray Mill Creek where the boat was located. We arrived at the river about 7:30 in the morning. The water was already over almost all of the low flood plain and rapidly rising. This was not at all encouraging. It was necessary for us to wade some distance and do a little swimming to reach the rowboat. However, this mattered little because we were already wet from the heavy rain. Soon we were in the boat and headed up the river toward the old Chafin-Jernigan field half a mile below the Florida-Alabama state line.

Within less than an hour we had hustled the few cattle from the old field, swimming them a short distance to the hill country. This was easily done because the cattle were all gentle and evidently knew they should be removed from the flood waters.

We now turned down the river to look for the hogs in the area of the Gaylor Dead River Log and Timber Landing. We went down through the swamp to the Betts Lake Log and Timber Landing, following father's old cypress float roads cut and used a few years before. From the Betts Lake Landing the main river was followed because travel was faster in the swift current. Soon after passing the Steam Mill Bluff Log and Timber Landing we left the main river and headed down through the swamp looking for hogs on a few small knolls and narrow ridges yet above the water. No hogs were found until after passing the Gaylor Dead River Landing. However, each ridge and knoll was a haven for wildlife. On one we saw a few wild turkeys and a number of small low bush birds. Seemingly they were enjoying have a little dirt and leaves to scratch in and find a few more bugs before having to fly to the hill country. On another ridge we saw a couple of raccoons quietly resting on a large tree stooping over a slough near some drift wood as if watching closely for the foaming whorls and boils to cast ashore a drowned pig, shoat or yearling along with great quantities of debris being thrown up to build the ridge a little higher. A little lower down the same ridge we saw possum quietly resting on a stump as if waiting for hunger or higher water to compel him to swim to higher ground. We

crossed the upper end of the Gaylor Dead River into the small area known then as Gaylor Dead River Island where we knew a few hogs were wont to range. Nothing was found on this island except a pair of large swamp rabbits. They were sitting on the upturned roots of a large blown-over water oak tree as if waiting for the middle of the day to swim 200 yards to the foot of a high bluff. As we came into the open dead river a large hawk flew from a tall tree back toward the hill country. Then we thought that perhaps the rabbits knew the hawk was watching them and waiting for them to head across the open water to safety and they were watching the hawk and waiting for him to seek a dinner elsewhere when they would have a better chance for a clear swim to the hill, and maybe without dodging and diving to escape the hawk's talons.

A few hundred yards below the mouth of the dead river approximately 40 head of hogs were located on a long narrow ridge yet approximately six inches above the surface of the rising waters. We left the boat hoping to drive the herd straight into the deep slough and after swimming them across it, drive them a short distance down another ridge toward the hill half a mile below the log landing. If this could be done the swimming distance would be short. In this we were disappointed. The entire herd, consisting of all sizes and ages from grown ones to two groups of 30 day old pigs, ran off down the ridge and entered the deep water where the slough was much wider. We were now 200 yards from our boat. We stood and watched the herd swim in a circuitous route winding among some big gum trees indicating they were passing over a low place. On the opposite side of the deep water approximately a hundred feet away, the herd scrambled over a large drift of dead treetops, brush and logs, evidently floated and lodged across the regular passage way used by the hogs in coming into and returning from this part of the swamp. The entire herd got through the drift except two small pigs. They had gotten pushed a little below the route swam by the older mother hogs and were behind a log too big and slick for them to climb over. After watching them slip from the side of the log several times and each time drop a little beneath the surface, father suggested that since we were already wet from wading that I swim across the slough and lift the pigs over the big slick log while he would go back and get the boat. After rescuing the pigs and helping them rejoin their mothers, the entire herd swam readily across a strip of backwater 200 yards wide and from two to four feet deep to a high bluff at the edge of the flood plain.

About the time the hogs reached the hill father came up with the boat and we returned to the deep swift slough and went down it to the main river about half a mile above the Mimms Island Log and Timber Landing. Just before we passed the landing a flock of several wild turkeys flew almost directly over out boat and lighted in some tall trees on the Escambia County side of the river. Some hunter or hunters had evidently scared them near the backwater and they had run to the top of the high known as the Devil's Backbone from which place they found it easy to fly across the river.

While we were in the open river we observed several large flocks of black birds, purple grackles and robins flying high above the tops of the swamp trees. Of course each variety of these birds was flying separate and apart from the other variety. It was now past the middle of the day. The sun was shining a little. Occasionally a group of several hundred of these birds would light in the tops of the tall tupelo trees where they feasted on berries.

While eating these berries the birds kept up an incessant chatter as they flew from tree to tree and hopped from branch to branch in selecting the choicest drupaceous fruit. It was observed that after feeding a short while on the fruit in the very tops of the tallest of the tupelo gum trees these birds raised high above the tree tops and continued their flight southeastward. To us this indicated a cold wave was probably less then twenty four hours behind, chasing them toward a warmer climate.

We continued down the main river past the Forbes Ferry Landing and the Sunday Log and Timber Landing, later known as the Harvey Carnley Landing because he became the owner of the land. Just below the landing we passed the mouth of a small slough containing a lot of drift logs and trash. At the upper edge of this drift was a large cypress treetop with several limbs protruding high above the surface of the water. Perched on one limb was a large raccoon gazing interestingly at the water just above the drift. Ten of fifteen away on another limb was a possum doing the same thing. It was plain to see that they were watching wishfully for the foaming waters to bring some flood victim to the drift to feed them so they could ride the old drift contentedly through the flood and avoid a long swim in the cold swirling waters. A little further down the river we passed another smaller slough with its opening partially filled with drift wood, mostly small limbs and trash, with no snags or limbs standing above the water. Almost directly over the drift was a big bobcat lying in the forks of a tree and looking interestingly at the incoming drifts of limbs and trash. He too must have had some selfish designs in his head, or maybe I should say his stomach, about flood victims. A short distance below the Harvey Carnley field we heard two gunshots seemingly at the edge of the backwater. Almost immediately a flock of wild turkeys flew over the river not far behind us and from the sounds out their wings lighted in tall tree tops near the river.

It was now past the middle of the afternoon. We left the river and headed through the swamp expecting to cut off a big bend in the river and reach the “Cut Off” much sooner. We planned to search through the “Cut Off” and land at the Williams Lake Log and Timber Landing and walk a mile or so to Grandfather’s home down on the Diamond Mill Creek where we would spend the night.

When we had traveled down a swift slough for 15 or 20 minutes we heard men hollowing directly ahead of us as if driving cattle. Within five minutes the hollowing became more rapid as if the men were having trouble with the cattle. We increased our speed in order to lead a helping hand if needed. We were now in what was known as the “McCaskill Lower Swamp.” Soon we came upon the Hon. E.V. McCaskill and his two nephews, Van and Ed, both mature men, driving or attempting to drive a herd of their cattle from the swamp to safety. The cattle had scattered and were refusing to leave the high ridge upon which they had huddled. The cattle would drive until they came to swimming water and then they would scatter and return to the ridge which was now approximately knee-deep in water.

Uncle Edward was in a boat and Van and Ed were wading. Our boat was steered up to Uncle Edward’s boat. Van and Ed came wading to the boats. After an exchange of greetings, father offered to assist them in swimming their cattle to safety. He also

explained as we were on our way to the “Cut Off” to search for the Wily Williams cattle, sold a few years ago to Mr. Bray. Immediately Uncle Edward reported that he and his two nephews had come directly from the “Cut Off” not more than an hour ago and that no cattle were left in that area and that it would be useless for us to search that place for the Williams cattle. The trip to the “Cut Off” was abandoned and upon request we aided our friends in swimming their cattle to safety.

After conferring for a few minutes it was agreed that Uncle Edward should take his boat and stay on one side of the cattle and father take his boat and stay on the other side. Van, Ed and I were requested to arm ourselves each with a long brush and get directly behind the herd and do our best to rush the cattle straight into the deep water. We tried this two or three times and each time as soon as the cattle came to deep water they would scatter and return to the shallow water on the ridge, ignoring men, brush and boats.

Uncle Edward and father held another conference. They immediately moved both boats to the opposite side of the ridge from the hill country and instructed Van, Ed and me to drive the cattle slowly down the ridge with the swift current now flowing knee deep over it at the highest points and to permit them to turn toward the hill as soon as they would do so of their own accord. The cattle were driven this way hoping they would go down the ridge to the trail customarily used by them in crossing the deep slough in coming into or returning from this ridge and take the swimming water as soon as coming to it, notwithstanding it might be covered with water deep enough to swim cattle. The ruse worked. After driving the cattle slowly and cautiously approximately 250 yards until the ridge disappeared and the cattle were swimming, they turned voluntarily toward the hill taking the deep water as if they knew where they were going. The older ones led the way with the others following directly behind. Soon the entire herd was swimming in a long circuitous row winding among the tall trees surrounded by brushy tops and small trees and bushes protruding above the surface. The procession resembled a herd of cattle being driven along a winding road in a thick forest.

Van now got in the boat with Uncle Edward and kept a few yards directly behind the hindermost members of the swimming herd. Ed and I got in the boat with father and kept a few yards below the cattle near the middle of the herd. The cattle were permitted to select their own route across a half a mile or more of low swamp covered from six to twelve feet in water. The water was not cold enough to numb the cattle. Neither were any of the cattle thin or weak enough to become tired in swimming this short distance across the swift current. The entire herd was landed safely about sunset without a single mishap. The cattle had swum directly over the route used by them in coming into the swamp and returning to the hill country.

It was now too late for father and me to start on our return trip up the river or up the swamp because within half an hour the night would be too dark for us to see our way in the swamp or to see drifting treetops and timber in the open river that might capsize out boat. The water was now at high flood stage and rapidly rising. This latter fact caused father to decide he should go home tonight in order to give instructions to some men about taking care of some rafts of square timber tied up at the mouth of Bray Mill Creek.

It was immediately arranged for father to ride Ed McCaskill's horse home where he could give instructions about the timber and would then return to the boat landing about sunrise tomorrow morning when further searching would be done for stranded livestock. I was to spend the night at the home of Uncle Edward McCaskill. The five of us were to meet at the boats the next morning as soon as the swamp was light enough to allow us to handle the boats among the thick trees and swift foaming water.

We were all back at the boats early the next morning. The river had risen approximately two feet during the night. A sharp drop in the temperature had come during the night. The robins, blackbirds and purple grackles were right in migrating further south to get away from the cold wave. And too our plans had to be somewhat changed. The afternoon before, a child of one of our neighbors had died. It was necessary to obtain certain materials not purchasable on our side of the river for the burial of the child. At this time no merchandizing establishments were in operation on the Santa Rosa county side of this river in the Pine Level area. During freshets it was impossible to cross this river except in small rowboats. Boats were scarce and but few men available who could or who would undertake to paddle or row a boat through the thick swamp across nearly two miles of swift current made up of foaming, swirling, raging waters. About 9:00 the night before two men had come to father's home seeking some one who could get across the flooded river and get the necessary material. Father had arranged to cross the river to the village of Bluff Springs early this morning, purchase the material needed and deliver it to some one at the edge of the backwater at the foot of the big hill on the Bluff Springs Ferry Road not later than 10:00 this morning.

This incident is mentioned here to show what difficulties often confronted people residing on the east side of this river in this community before stores were located here or good roads and bridges were available for crossing the river. Once or twice each year this river would stay at flood stage for from one to four weeks during which time all supplies used in a large area directly east of the river had to be brought across the river and the low flood plain in small rowboats. Boats were always scarce because during the long periods between floods the boats would be left at the river and often mysteriously disappear. Many were the times father was called upon to wade the flood waters across the low flood plain of this river and then cross the river on a drifting log or swim it to get a doctor or medicine for a neighbor during severe sickness.

The plan agreed upon for the morning was about as follows: Father and I would go to Bluff Springs, then a thriving sawmill town having a number of splendid stores, get the material needed and bring it back to the foot of the big hill on the Ferry Road according to the arrangements. In doing this we were to search carefully all high knolls and ridges in the flood waters between our boat landing and Bluff Springs and between Bluff Springs and the landing place at the foot of the big hill. After delivering the material we were to search a few high ridges adjacent to the Campbell slough and in the Carnley swamp. This would keep us busy until about noon when we would have to start out ten mile rowboat trip up the flooded river. Uncle Edward and his two nephews were to search what was referred to as the McCaskill lower swamp, and area along the swamp slough

formed by the McCaskill Mill Creek, the “Cut Off” and all the area adjacent to the Wily Williams Lake.

The day was dark, cold and damp. It was difficult to tell the time of day in the open and next to impossible in the thick swamp. However, a few minutes after we headed into the main river at the first big cove below the Harvey Carnley field, we heard the noon whistle at the Bluff Springs sawmill. We now had ahead of us the longest and hardest continuous rowboat trip up swift foaming flood waters I ever made. And to make it harder, we were using a rather heavy running well water soaked boat. Not withstanding the hard rowing and paddling it turned out to be a very interesting afternoon. There was not a dull moment during the trip. In many ways it was far more interesting than the trip down the river the previous day when we traveled the greater portion of the way in the main river, taking advantage of the swift current in the open.

As we passed the drift in the head of the slough where the day before we had seen one raccoon and one possum on the big protruding limbs we saw two of each quietly waiting for a drowned calf of a pig to drift in for their feasting. We also saw two or three big moccasins lying coiled on the largest logs in the drift. They were now too numb from cold to swim to the hill and could do nothing but sleep through the cold spell or wait till the flood waters subsided when they could find a warmer hibernating place beneath the old drift.

As we passed by the Harvey Carnley old field, we saw two hunters walking near the water, each carrying a wild turkey. Naturally we supposed that they were the men we heard shooting near this old field the day before when the turkeys flew over the river directly behind our boat. They knew the turkeys would return to their feeding grounds near the edge of the flood waters and probably had been waiting and watching for their return and each had bagged a bird. From the Carnley field to Mimms Island Log and Timber Landing we kept in the main river, of course staying on the side having the least current. While in the main river we could see and hear thousands of robins, blackbirds and purple grackles as they fed among the tops of the tall tupelo gum trees on either side of the stream. Occasionally great flocks of these birds would rise far above the tops of the tall trees and head southeastward. Occasionally a large hawk would be seen perched high in the top of a tupelo gum tree growing near the river bank as if waiting for an unsuspecting bird to venture near and fly out in the open space over the river when an effort would be made to catch it before it could cross the river or return among the thick protective trees.

At Mimms Island Landing we saw men working to secure some rafts of logs that seemingly were in danger of being washed away. Other men were making secure some logs banked on the landing that was now covered a few inches deep in water.

Immediately after passing this landing we left the main river and turned up the swamp keeping rather close to the shore line of the backwater where the current was slow. Here we could travel faster and with less strenuous work. As we passed in sight of the foot of the highest point or head of the Devil’s Backbone, we saw a flock of approximately a

dozen wild turkeys feeding at the edge of the water directly under the high bluff forming the north side of the Backbone. Along the edge of the shoreline we saw hundreds of birds, such as cardinals, brown thrushes, hermit thrushes, jays, purple grackles, rice birds, robins, blackbirds and many other small ones known to the average laymen as little swamp warblers. Almost all of them were flitting about among the low bushes or scratching among the leaves. Occasionally a group of them would be seen hopping about on drifts of limbs and leaves and trash as if feeding on bugs and berries caught in the debris. It was plain to see that these little birds had been driven by the flood waters from much of their feeding grounds in the low flood plain of the river. They were here making the best of the situation. From the cheerful noises being made they were gay and happy. They had accepted the situation and were making the best of it. Not a single bird or a group of these birds were seen in a droopy manner or mien. Not a single sad or complaining note or chirp was heard. They were all busy, yes, far too busy to wear a sad look or sound a complaining note. This became so interesting until father and I more than once rested our oars while the boat was held against a tree as we observed the situation. As the wise writer or the Book of Proverbs would say; we looked upon the situation, observed it and received instructions.

This situation was made more wonderful when we observed sitting in the trees above the birds, big hawks, little hawks, big horned owls, smaller barred owls and little swamp owls, all intent upon dining on the little feathered musicians of the forest. A little further up the swamp from the favorite feeding grounds of the little birds we saw a large hawk sitting on a big cypress stump picking the feathers from what appeared from a distance to be a robin.

Soon we found the big swamp rabbits having been forced to vacate their favorite feeding grounds in the swamp had taken refuge along the thick swampy places of the shoreline. Then a little later we learned at least four members of the feline family probably were driven from hide-outs far in the marsh swamps and were lurking along the edge of the backwater intent upon dinnering daily during the flood on dainty swamp warblers or rabbit steak, tender and juicy. Between the Mimms Island landing and the Dead River landing we saw possums, foxes, raccoons and bobcats lurking by the water's edge. One raccoon was seen to jump from hiding under a few low overhanging bushes in an effort to catch a brown thrush as it searched among the leaves for food. We were delighted that the thrush was too quick for the slow jump of a raccoon. Near the Malone Old Hammock field we saw a big buck swamp rabbit being chased by a gray fox. The big rabbit was avoiding a race and depending almost entirely upon his ability to out-dodge his antagonistic chaser. It was doubtful if the fox had rabbit steak for late dinner or early supper because instead of running into the backwater as it appeared the fox was trying to make him do, the rabbit was satisfied to do some expert dodging by running into a small clump of thick bushes and stopping dead still until the fox had passed a little beyond the bushes. Then while the fox would be looking for the rabbit twenty or thirty feet beyond the bushes, the rabbit would be making speed backtracking himself.

Approximately half a mile below Gaylor Dead River Landing near the Baggett bay-gall we saw a bobcat chasing a rabbit as if he too was hungry for tender juicy steak. When we

first caught a glimpse of the rabbit and cat they were coming full speed ahead directly toward the backwater with the cat close behind and gaining. It appeared that the rabbit would be caught before reaching the water. However, it seemed little difference if the rabbit was caught at the edge of the water or a short distance in it. While rabbits are splendid swimmers, probably just as good as bobcats, we didn't think that they are as good at diving or climbing over drifts as the bobcats. The cat seemingly was doing his best to catch the rabbit and avoid a cold swim and therefore put forth all possible speed. Just as the rabbit neared the water the cat opened wide his mouth and turned it horizontally to better clinch the tender steak. Just then the rabbit probably spied the big mouth and the long white teeth that were ready to eat him up and got badly frightened. Anyway, he jumped off at a right angle and headed straight into a cluster of thick bushes without even stopping to see what effect a cold bath had on his enemy's appetite. When the bobcat extracted himself from the cold backwater, the rabbit was not in sight but was probably way back in the bay-gall doing some zigzag back-tracking stunts just to tease his old enemy for giving him such a fright, while the poor kitty shook the cold water from his fine fur and no doubt, from his looks, felt foolish.

As we came into the Gaylor Dead River, a few yards below the log landing we saw a group of herons feeding in the shallow water on the landing and the open spaces nearby. In the group were three varieties: the great blue heron, the great white heron and the little blue heron. No egrets were there. In seemed these water loving birds too had been driven by the flood waters from their usual feeding grounds in the swamp ponds, swamp sloughs and on the long sandbars beside the river's edge. At the first sight of us and the boat they began rising a few at a time, struck their long slender legs straight behind them and went lumbering down the river and settled on an old drift in the head of Black Lake slough.

We passed quickly by the landing. As we went around the bend a hundred yards above the landing a flock of wood ducks rose from the water and lighted 300 yards further up the river. Evidently the ducks had to do plenty of flying to find shallow water for feeding grounds during the high flood period.

Approximately 200 yards from the landing we left the dead river and traveled in the swamp near the edge of the backwater near the foot of a steep bluff. All along the water's edge beside this bluff were great numbers of low bush birds such as robins and warblers. They were all busy and seemingly contented, although being watched by numerous hawks, owls and felines. Here we saw no raccoons, foxes or bobcats on the ground. A possum was seen as if searching for frogs along the edge of the water. The small birds were paying little or no attention to this possum. Evidently they knew this little marsupial was too slow to catch quick flying birds.

We entered the main river a few hundred yards below the Steam Mill Bluff Log and Timber Landing. Soon after entering the river we saw four or five white tail deer. They walked to the edge of the high bluff and gazed straight at the rushing foaming water. Presently they saw us approaching and after gazing at us a little while they trotted leisurely to the upper end of the bluff and disappeared in the nearby bushes. At the upper end of this landing we again traveled up the edge of the backwater to avoid the swift

current of the main river. It was now approximately 4:00 o'clock, cold, cloudy and real dark in the swamp. We heard very little wildlife except a few melancholy calls of the big horned owls and the barred swamp owls. They were evidently stirring as if night had fallen in the swamp.

Half a mile below the mouth of the Bray Mill Creek we entered the Henry Bray field by passing over the top of a high board fence. In the upper side of the cultivated field where the water was shallow, a large flock of wood ducks were observed industriously feeding by diving and digging in the soft field dirt with their bills. So busy were they that they did not fly until we were close upon them. We arrived at the mouth of the Bray Mill Creek where we found the rafts of timber that father had been a little worried about to be safe and sound and seemingly in no danger of being knocked loose by drifting timber. We carried the boat up the creek to the edge of the backwater and tied it beside the big field gate and then headed for home. We were glad to get a little leg exercise and arm rest.

Our walk home was four and a half miles, as the old time pioneers were want to say, "Measured by the section lines." We made this rather quickly because the weather was getting real cold, down to a little below freezing. After supper we really enjoyed sitting around the warm fire and discussing with the other family members our experiences with, "River Floods and Freshets."

The experiences of these two days are given here because such experiences were an important part of the early history along the low flood plains of the Escambia-Conecuh River, its two tributaries, Patsaliga and Sepulga and all its larger creeks.

The Spaniards were the first to graze cattle along the flood plains of the Escambia-Conecuh River and its lower tributaries and creeks. At an early date they brought Spanish longhorns to this area. Many were introduced out from the early Spanish Trading Post at Floridatown. The Spaniards also brought Pretty Pied Ponies to this area. The cattle and ponies were grazed up the river from Floridatown and up on Pond Creek, a few miles east from the river. Descendants of these Spanish Longhorns and Pretty Pied Ponies were still in the area grazing on the open range seventy five years after the United States purchased Florida from Spain in 1821. Beef cattle were driven from this area during the Civil War to help feed the Confederate Army. Many head of beef cattle were driven from the open range along the Conecuh River where the chief grazing was on the bamboo and reeds growing along the river, its tributaries and small creeks, branches and seeping hillsides.

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A Rainy Day at Camp

Near the middle of November 1868 threatening weather had prevailed during two days. Variable winds and scattering clouds prevailed all day. Toward night the winds became a gentle breeze from the southwest. The clouds also became more general but rather thin. By eight p.m. the wind had ceased to blow and almost all of the clouds had vanished. Almost all during the second day a light breeze blew from the south carrying rather thick low overhanging clouds toward the north. About the middle of the afternoon the winds became variable and began shifting from the southeast. By 8:00 p.m., bedtime at the camp, the wind had shifted almost directly from the east. The clouds were broken at times so that light shone between them. At other the times they were thick, giving the night a pitch dark appearance.

The camp crew went to bed in a murky mood. Each man now had agreed that tomorrow would be a rainy day at camp. They dreaded rainy days at camp. Rainy days are dreaded at all institutions and a piney woods log camp was no exception to the general rule. The men disliked the loss of time from work. They dreaded to have to spend a week day in idleness. It was then no work, no pay. But worst of all they dreaded the loneliness at camp with nothing to do but lounge and loaf. The melancholy spirit usually prevailing during a rainy day at camp was getting on their nerves. They felt it.

A short time after midnight the wind became harder from the northeast. The clouds were thicker. The wind continued in occasional hard puffs, making mournful sounds as it swept around the corners of the old log cabin causing the men to sleep little during the last half of the night. The moaning and sighing of the wind forcing its way through the thick pine bows in the groves adjacent to the camp and the loss of sleep added to the feeling of the dreaded rainy day at camp.

At 4:00 a.m. Cook began the preparation of breakfast. Immediately after the men heard the rattling of pans and pots they began slowly crawling from their bunks. Pap came out first. He was followed by Bud. Soon Dave and Sarge were sitting on the side of their bunks stretching and yawning as a protest against having to get up on a rainy day. As soon as Pap and Bud were dressed they went outside the shack to observe the weather. They came back within a few minutes and reported a few drops of rain were now falling and the clouds were thick and coming directly from the northeast, indicating a full day of rain, which of course meant swollen streams, muddy log roads and soft boggy woods. They reported the weather conditions and announced it was going to be a rainy day at camp.

Soon all hands sat down to breakfast, each man was wearing a long despondent face and emitting wide gaping yawns and sad sighs. Before breakfast was over the rain began to fall in a slow drizzle. “This” said Pap “means a long rainy day.” Immediately he began to discuss plans for keeping every body busy during the rainy day at camp. As he began sipping his third pouring of coffee he said, “Men, if we don’t get rid of these long faces, yawns and sighs, we’ll be too sick to work tomorrow and perhaps the rest of the week.”

Immediately Bud spoke up by telling the men he had a nice long strip of rawhide from a large, fat, red steer killed last summer by Uncle Mint Carnley and if this was a rainy day he would make a nice long driving whip for use instead of the old stiff stub he'd been using for a month or more. Then he added, "I'll have a whip that can be heard three miles when it's popped 'Way 'fore day' in the morning."

Sarge reported he would go to the nearby swamps and hammocks for a suitable piece of wood to make a new jacking stick to take the place of the short stubby one he had been using for over a week. He then explained that the stubby one is so short it is hard for him to hoist the big logs he has to haul. He also would get some young straight hickory for making a new handle for his cart ax. This caused Bud to think again. He said, "Bring an extra piece of hickory for me. I've broken my cart ax handle twice lately and it's too short yet."

This caused Dave to remark that his chopping ax handle was badly cracked and that he supposed he would go with Sarge and try to find a young straight swamp hickory sapling for making a new handle for his chopping ax. Said Pap; "This reminds me that boss Williams wants us to get some longer handles in our axes within another week or two for use in chopping a few sticks of extra big hewn timber he contracted to haul and deliver to the Ferry Pass. The timber is so big that it will require the use of extra long handles to reach the bottom edge unless we stoop enough to stick our heads between our knees.

Then Pap reported that boss Williams would be in the woods doing the hewing himself and that he would expect us to do a good job so the hewing wouldn't be so hard. He then added, "You know boss Williams hews timber smoother than a carpenter can dress a plank with a big sharp jackplane." He then requested Dave to bring a few extra pieces of good straight material a full four feet long. These would be used to make the long timber chopping handles today.

As Pap drained the last sip of coffee from his cup he looked at Cook with a twinkle in his eye and said; "Cook can't you scheme up some way to have roast turkey or venison steak for dinner today to bring good cheer to a rainy day at camp?" Cook made no immediate reply but the men knew from the smile on his face and the twinkle in his eye he had something "Up his sleeve" as he was wont to say. The rain was now falling a little faster than it was when they sat down to breakfast. Cook walked to the door of the cabin and surveyed the weather and returned to his coffee sipping with the rest of the men. He was now wearing a broader smile. The men knew he would speak soon and reveal what he had "Up his sleeve."

He sipped the last swallow of coffee from his big cup and said: "Pap, it's not yet daylight. I think we still have time enough to have roast turkey for the rainy day dinner at camp if you will assist me, and the added, "How about it?" "At your service," said Pap. Cook then requested Pap to take his old shot gun and slip quickly and quietly down on the Devil's Backbone about opposite the edge of the bay-gall on the south side of the backbone and hide near a big beech tree near the first big rocks on the backbone where he could see some distance to the east and down the hill to the south.

Pap was off like a cart wheel when the linchpin breaks. Cook then hastily grabbed his gun and taking his dogs on a leash just in case they were needed for an emergency and was off like a jug handle when the jug breaks. As he left the shack he requested Dave to straighten up the dishes a little and latch the door if all hands left the camp before he returned.

Cook hurried off to the southeast across the creek and went up a small branch a short distance and hid himself and the dogs in a thicket of small bushes. Day was already breaking and the rain was falling slowly. He fondly hoped the rain and rough weather would keep the turkeys on the new-found roost a little later than is customary for this American wild game bird. His hopes were fulfilled. Within five minutes a turkey yelp sounded from the tops of some tall trees a hundred yards east of him. Immediately the yelp was answered by several yelps from a flock a hundred yards or more over the hill to the southwest of his hiding place. These yelps were followed by a flopping of wings in the tall trees and he saw a large turkey hen sailing toward him. She lighted about 40 yards away in an open space. As she struck the ground, Cook fired his gun and the large turkey hen fluttered a little and lay still.

Cook now sensed the situation. He picked up his turkey and leading his dogs ran as quickly as possible approximately a mile to the southwest in order to get in the hammock adjacent to the bay-gall south of where he expected the flock of turkeys to enter it. His object was to cause the turkeys to run north under cover of the hammock and then as was their custom to run to the top of the Devil's Backbone as a vantage point from which turkeys could easily fly away and light in the tops of tall trees.

Within ten minutes or less Cook was in the hammock. He led his dogs entirely through the hammock in order to find out if the turkeys had gone south in it or were still hiding further north so it would be possible for him to walk up the hammock and cause the flock to remain on the ground until reaching the high hill known as Devil's Backbone. After walking approximately a quarter of a mile in the hammock toward Pap's stand, the dogs began to sniff and try to get loose. Soon the dogs began to trail something. He let them follow the trail, however, he was still holding to the leash. Soon he found turkey tracks. He then found where some of the flock had scratched among the leaves on the ground. He now knew they were in the hammock and planned to cause them to stay on the ground and run out near Pap. He yelled loudly at his dogs a few times to cause the turkeys to move on up the hammock. After following the trail a few hundred yards, to within half a mile of Pap, he encouraged the dogs to bark a few times. Within five minutes he heard Pap's gun. He then hurried out of the hammock and down through the piney woods toward the backbone. When he got in sight of the backbone he saw Pap coming down the big hill with an extra large gobbler swung over his shoulder.

They soon met and after an exchange of a few words of congratulations they headed over the low part of the hill toward the camp.

They arrived at the camp before any of the men had gotten to work except Bud, whom they found busy fixing the rawhide strings for his new driving whip that he could "pop" to his heart's content "Way 'fore day in the morning." Pap's turkey weighed 24 pounds and Cook's tipped the scales at 14 pounds.

The long faces, wide gaping yawns and sad sighs were all gone. A different spirit prevailed at the camp notwithstanding 'twas a rainy day and dreary.

The men now had to stand around the big open fireplace a while to congratulate Cook and Pap over their successful hunting trip. Pap stopped the congratulations quickly by stating that Cook already had the unfortunate birds staked out. All they had to do was to go bring them to camp. They were in a talking mood and just had to stand around the wide open fireplace for a little talk fest and to chew a little plug of tobacco. The rain was still falling steadily. No doubt the rainy day at camp was here, but the usual rainy day spirit was gone.

About 8:00 a.m. Bud and Sarge fed their teams and let them out from the lots to seek more comfortable resting places and to graze a little on the range. Bud then returned to his whip making. Sarge and Dave went to the nearby swamps and hammocks in search of material for making a new jacking stick and new ax handles. Pap agreed to remain in camp and help Cook dress the turkeys and prepare one for dinner. All hands went about their tasks, not with low spirits and the stride of a slowpoke, but with elastic steps and lingering smiles. The new jacking stick, ax handles and the big whip for popping "Way 'fore day in the morning" were almost ready for use by noon. Only a few finishing touches were needed to complete them.

About 12:30 the aroma of boiling coffee and the odors arising from the simmering turkey, as it was being constantly basted with Pop's specialized turkey sauce, constrained the men to cease work and assemble before the big fireplace to see the finishing touches required to make the 24 pound gobbler the best one ever to be served at camp or residence along the Old Winding River Road. This business of watching the final touches in the preparation of the turkey and sniffing the aromas arising when the big oven lid was lifted for the final basting turned out to be great appetizing processes. The talk fest before the big open fireplace lasted only fifteen or twenty minutes during which time the men all talked "Turkey and the trimmings." During this seemingly long time the men starved to death two or three times but fortunately for the men and the camp the aromas arising from the frequent basting of the turkey and the boiling coffee revived them. It beats spirits of ammonia two to one for reviving starving folks.

At approximately 1:00 p.m. all hands were seated around the rustic festive board wistfully looking, smiling and sniffing at a 24 pound roasted turkey, brown and tender, a great quantity of dressing made of golden cornbread and seasoned and basted with all the appetizing spices needed, a huge bowl brim full of spicy brown gravy, a big pan full of sweet potatoes packed close around the turkey in the old time oven where they simmered and flavored till candied through and through and a large platter of golden cornbread from meal fresh from the little watermill and baked the southern style, crusty and tasty.

Of course Cook's two gallon coffee pot was full and running over of Pap's favorite blended coffee, smoking hot and giving off that appetizing aroma that wafts men's worries away and makes them glad to be alive.

As Pap, the dear old philosopher of the camp, took his place at the head of the table, he philosophized as follows must to the merriment of the men: "Men the plain plebians have at last become proud aristocrats. Bacon, beans, biscuits and blackstrap have at last vanished from this festive board. May we, as proud aristocrats, do justice to the occasion with dignity, honor, reverence and thankfulness. So say we all. Amen."

Pap then carved the turkey while obeying all the well established rules of Southern etiquette. The men nearly died from sheer starvation trying to maintain a reverent dignified manner while Pap took his time in carving the turkey and serving the plates.

As soon as the last plate was served and passed to the owner the eating was on in earnest. No one took time to prolong the talk fest. All was quiet except the rhythm of chewing teeth and smacking lips. This rhythm was continued until the third helping was served and consumed. During the serving and while it was being consumed the men began to take time out to express thanks to Cook and Pap for the splendid job done in cooking the turkey and all the trimmings just right. In the meantime, Cook had served the third pouring of Pap's famous blend of hot coffee. The aroma from it had filled the shack full to the roof, there being no overhead loft or ceiling.

The men were now too full for utterance. The after dinner talk fest soon faded away. The men sat around the fire and dozed. Bud and Sarge soon stretched out across their bunks for a snooze. Pap assisted Cook in placing the unconsumed portion back into the two great ovens on the fireplace where it would remain warm for supper. He then assisted Cook in dish washing and in cleaning up the camp. Dave brought a supply of fresh cool water from the nearby spring. The three then joined Bud and Sarge for a short nap.

A little after the middle of the afternoon the rain ceased to fall. Soon the thickest of the clouds were disappearing. The sun came out a little before sunset time. About 4:00 p.m. the men all scattered out from the camp shack. Bud began putting the finishing touches on his big popping whip; Sarge began finishing his jacking stick and ax handle. When Bud completed his long new popping whip he made a new handle for his cart ax to take the place of the one he described as, "Still too short after being broken twice."

Dave and Pap began work on the new long ax handles for use in chopping the big sticks of timber for boss William to hew. As soon as Bud and Sarge had their new handles in their cart axes they made some new bow keys from the remnants of the ax handle material. "Much needed keys" said Bud. A little before sunset the crew returned to the camp shack where Cook was busy making some book entries. Pretty soon Cook left his book wide open upon what a few hours before had served as the festive board for the aristocrats and began fumbling among his meager supply of groceries and papers on some nearby shelves. Immediately, as was his custom, Sarge went to the open book and began an effort to learn how much had been charged to each man in the camp during the

month. Sarge, who could hardly read “reading”, had a hard time trying to read writing. He spelled and fumbled over several pages of accounts in an effort to locate the November charges. The other men who had received a tip from Cook sat quietly asking him nothing about any of the accounts. Cook kept fumbling among the dishes and papers on the shelves as if trying to find some lost object.

Finally Sarge came to what he assumed to be the charge account of one of the men having almost two pages filled. Immediately he exclaimed: “Gee whillikins, Cook, who in the name of common sense has got himself in a jack [the term used for getting oneself in debt] by filling two pages with charge items before the middle of the month? Somebody in the camp is plum crazy from lack o’ sense.” Cook turned from his fumbling and said: “I don’t know Sarge. Look at the top of the first page and read the first line or two. That’ll tell the tale.” The other men in the camp expressed themselves as being interested to know who in the camp is, “Plum crazy for lack o’ sense,” and asked Sarge to read aloud. Sarge began to spell out a few words and finally completed reading the following heading for the two page account: “Un rea son a ble lies told in No vem ber 1868 by Sarge.” There was silence for a few seconds. Seemingly, the men did not understand instantly the full meaning of the head lines read. It took about a minute for them to get the full meaning and to read Sarge’s face.

Needless to say there was an unusual roar of hilarious shouts and laughter in the camp as soon as the heading read was understood. It lasted for five or ten minutes. When it subsided Sarge was as wilted as a wet dish rag. He looked up at the men and said: “You’ve broken me from sucking eggs and sticking my nose out to be clipped off. I’m plum crazy and you fellows know why. I ain’t got no sense anyhow.”

If the dinner served had left one iota of rainy day gloomy despondency in a single member of the camp crew the prank played on Sarge had removed it and had given the dispositions of every man a harmonious balance. Jokes and wisecracks were heard on every hand. Jollity reigned supreme in the camp. As soon as the men ceased to razz Sarge, he and Bud went to the lot and fed their teams. Dave strolled out to bring in a little fuel for the fire to make a new pot of coffee and to warm the supper a little. Pap went to the spring for a fresh supply of water.

Near the spring Pap saw a large cluster of bull nettles. He was still thinking about the prank played on Sarge. Sight of the big nettles caused hem to consider using some of their tops for a little prankish fun to end the rainy day by rubbing the inside of the men’s sleeping garments with the leaves and tender stems of the nettles. Immediately he grabbed a handful of the tops from the nettles and carried them to the shack. While no one was looking he rubbed the inside of each man’s sleeping garments with the nettles, including a double portion for Sarge’s long white night shirt. The handful of crumpled up nettle tops were then packed away under one of the large ovens on the fireplace to assist in heating up the supper. Pap then caught Cook busy with other things and snitched from the oven a couple of pieces of turkey, a serving of dressing, and a couple of sweet potatoes, a hunk of cornbread and plenty of gravy. He then walked outside the shack and

ate it before going to assist Dave to bring some wood for fuel. Pap was not ready to spring the last rainy day prank on the men.

At supper Pap readily admitted he was hungry for more turkey and all the trimmings but because he had been bothered a little during the afternoon with a painful itching, stinging and burning, sometimes called “Wild Turkey Fall Fire” or “Turkey Itch” caused by eating too much wild turkey in the fall of the year when they had lived on certain bugs and berries that cause this sensation, he decided he would take only a cup or two of hot coffee and thus avoid further itching, stinging and burning. He then kindly admonished the men to be careful and not eat as much for supper as they had at noon lest they suffer a severe attack of this “Wild Turkey Fall Fire” or “Turkey Itch.”

The men paid no attention to his kindly admonitions and accused him of rubbing against some cow itch vines or poison oak while out after the big gobbler early in the morning. They knew where plenty of it grew near the Devil’s Backbone and knew of a few patches growing right up on the backbone near the big rocks where he had shot the gobbler. They just knew he had stumbled onto it in the darkness before day. This, they explained, was what caused his itching and admonished him to come on and eat turkey like a man. Pap declined and sipped his coffee while the men licked the platters clean notwithstanding all the warnings he gave them.

The men sat around the big fireplace for a long talk fest after supper. Pap occasionally twisted and scratched what he called his “Wild Turkey Fall Fire” but offered no comment. When the stinging and burning got worse Pap got Dave’s big bottle of kerosene oil from the chimney corner and made a pretense of rubbing a little on the burning spots. This soothed the stinging and burning. Pap retired first so he could watch the men as they retired without their observing him. He noticed that before donning their sleeping apparel the men did considerable twisting and scratching and closely observed the places scratched. Sarge and Dave even remarked that they had lots of red spots.

Within a few minutes after the men hit the bunks considerable twisting and scratching was heard. This only served to make the situation worse. Within ten minutes the men began to come from their bunks and get near the big fireplace. The fire was made brighter so they could better observe the itching burning spots. Within fifteen minutes the four men were turning, twisting, scratching and clawing before the bright pine knot fire. They were itching worse than a pack of mangy curs following a spraying with a strong solution of mange cure. After this scratching and clawing match continued a few minutes, Pap partially raised up in his bunk and enquired: “Have you fellow suffered a sudden attack of “Wild Turkey Fall Fire?” Without any let-up in the scratching and clawing, Cook and Sarge replied simultaneously, “No, we’re suffering from a severe attack of burning brimstone and hell fire.”

Pap lay back in his bunk and remained silent. The scratching and clawing circus continues. Pap was soon snoring a little as if he was sound asleep.

Soon Dave asked Pap what he did with his bottle of kerosene when he rubbed a little on his poisoned spots. After being called the third time, Pap replied that it was returned to its place in the chimney corner and added; “I knew you fellows would get that stinging burning sensation when you insisted on eating like gluttons at supper.” Pap then expressed sympathy for anyone or any group who had the misfortune to eat too much of anything at the wrong season. By this time Dave had returned with the bottle of kerosene. In handing it to the men he admonished them to use it with extreme caution lest it come too suddenly in contact with burning brimstone and hell fire and cause an explosion or an ignition more dangerous then the ailment itself. Soon all the men were feeling the soothing effects of the ointment and the circus was over.

The four continued standing or moving around the fireplace for a few minutes while joking and laughing about the fix they had gotten themselves into. Much talking was done in low tones or loud log camp whispering to keep from disturbing dear old Pap, the life of the camp. Several expressions like the following were heard by Pap, much to his delight, and repeated by him a few weeks later with more prankish fun.

“At first I thought old Pap was joking about that wild turkey fire stuff.” “I did too.” “Me too, but it shore is true, ain’t it?”

“You know, he’s been everywhere and knows nearly everything.” “He shore does. I wonder how he picked up so much in his travels.”

“You know Pap’s a good hearted old rascal but sometimes as mean as hell in playing pranks.” “That’s right, He shore is.”

“He’s made this a wonderful rainy day at camp. It only shows what a rainy day can be if all hands help.” “That’s right,” all chimed in as they returned to their bunks to end a delightful rainy day at camp.

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The Forbes Old Ferry Road Cypress Camp

This cypress camp was located a short distance below the Forbes Old Ferry Road on the west side of the Escambia River. The camp was approximately three quarters of a mile south of the Mimms Island Log and Timber Landing on the Escambia River at the mouth of Holly Mill Creek.

The logs at this camp were hauled to the river by ox teams. The man who owned the timber deadened the trees in August 1893. The trees were ready to cut and float in November of that year. No rain came sufficient to cause a flood in the river during winter or spring of 1894. A few of the trees were beginning to show signs of sap damage by a small cypress boring beetle. About the first of July in 1894 the man contracted with Uncle William Diamond, father's oldest brother, to haul the logs to the river. The first week in July Uncle William moved his log team to the timber and struck camp on a high ridge close beside the bank of the river at a splendid place to land the logs to be hauled. The camp shack set-up was a temporary one in the form of a lean-to made of poles and rough edge lumber for sides, roof and flooring. The ox lot was made by spiking two poles to swamp trees with a few temporary post set between a few of the trees used as posts.

Uncle William began work. Within two days he found one team could not pull some of the logs from the ponds and sloughs to firm ground where the cart could get to them. He also found there was much road cutting to be done before a team could get to many of the logs. Immediately he came and arranged with father to send a strong four yoke team to assist Uncle William's three yoke team in snaking many big logs from the sloughs and ponds. Father's team was not at work at that time. Within two or three days father, his teamster Dan and I moved the team to the camp and were ready for work early the next morning.

The camp crew was now composed of the following: Father's teamster, known as Dan and Uncle William's teamster, known as John. The road cutters and flunkies for moving snaking chains, ropes and hooks were Uncle William's 16 year old boy named Wright. He was known at the camp as Wright. I was his partner in this job. I was now known as J.T. to avoid having two people named John in the camp. Father and Uncle William were the bosses to lay out the roads to be cut and also to build the causeways and bridges necessary to cross some of the muddy places and several sloughs. They were known as William and Peter.

The camp crew and all logging machinery began to click the first day. Before night every part was moving logs to the river. The owner of the logs was at the landing to take care of the logs. The first few logs were rolled into the water and used for making a boom to hold the logs as they were rolled into the water. The seven yoke of oxen had no trouble in pulling the big logs from the boggy ponds and deep sloughs. The moving of cypress logs with ox teams was not as easy as floating them on flood water from the low swampy location. However, the owner of the logs was happy because he saw he would have his

logs to market before they were damaged by the cypress beetle and would not be forced to sell them at reduced prices.
The fifth day after father and I went to work at this camp the rain began to fall in torrents. It continued a portion of the afternoon and almost all night. When morning came much of the low swamp was three feet deep in water. The river continued to rise during the day. By nightfall the situation looked like a freshet was coming and was well on the way. By daybreak the next morning the water was at flood stage. The high camp ridge was almost covered. The owner of the logs had his rafting help out in the swamp assisting him to float his logs to the river. The cypress hauling was over and the teams had to be moved from the flood plain of the river. Moving preparations began in a hurry.

The camp floor was raised six feet. All feed and camp equipment was moved up higher. The camp was well braced against close-by trees to prevent swift water from washing it away. The carts were made fast to a tree. The oxen were gotten ready for the wading and swimming process. This was easy with Uncle William and father in charge. They each had much experience in swimming cattle and horses. The oxen were gentle and waded or swam where they were directed to wade or swim. They were all good swimmers too. They swam as if they enjoyed it. They seemed to get as many thrills from the swimming as the men did.

The rain continued to fall for a week. It was two or three weeks before father and I could get back into the swamp for the cart and the equipment. Two days before we were to go for the cart and other equipment, father went down and looked at the river. He found the water was low enough to get through the swamp without swimming. However, when we got to the deep sloughs the next day about noon the water was swimming depth. Hence we had to swim back into the camp. Heavy summer thunder cloud rains had fallen 20 miles up the river in torrents only two days and nights before we went for the cart and equipment. The water had now arrived.

We had to build a frame on the cart almost two feet high to hold some feed and equipment above the water in bringing it from the swamp. When we got home and unloaded the cart our experience in hauling cypress logs in a wet muddy swamp was ended with not too many pleasant memories.

The experiences we had at the Forbes Old Ferry Road Cypress Camp are given here because no doubt but what many other cypress owners and logging men had similar experiences throughout the basin of the Escambia-Conecuh River basin. I know that many men did in Florida and for a few miles north of the Florida-Alabama state line. At this time steam skidders or gasoline powered machinery were not used in the basin of the Escambia-Conecuh River for pulling logs from swamps, bay-galls or boggy marshes. Such machinery was brought to this river basin for this purpose after all of the big cypress trees had been cut and floated from the swampy lands or moved by ox teams.

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Getting Along With Wives

Bud

This is a sad and solemn subject we are talking about and should be a serious occasion. Here we are sitting around our campfire discussing our domestic affairs while our wives are at home slaving in an effort to take care of a bunch of hardheaded brats, no doubt, the very imp and image of their thoughtless daddies. Men, we shouldn't lie about them behind their backs. Really, men, I've never been a lover of lying, especially when it can accomplish no good.

Men, I've been sitting here slowly thinking, thinking, and thinking seriously as you fellows have been talking. As I thought, I looked up toward high heaven, and gazed at the glowing stars. Men, honest, there's nothing to hide us from the all-seeing eye of Jehovah. The canopy of heaven is wide open tonight and millions of twinkling stars, the very gates of heaven, are peeping at us. Jehovah's piercing eye certainly is staring tonight around this glowing campfire. His keen ear is listening, listening, listening at our silly conversation. Men, honest, under the present situation and circumstances I am constrained to tell the truth, the plain truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

You men well know that the Good Book and the Missionary have told us about telling the truth. Only last Sunday at the Mission Station, the Missionary told us if we are followers of the Savior of men we shall know the truth and the truth shall make us free. Men, honest, I believe he read this from the Book. Then he held the book in his uplifted hand and told us it is not enough for us to know the truth, but we must speak the truth. Now men, that's exactly what I'm going to do here tonight. With the all-seeing eye of Jehovah peeping down upon us from millions of windows and that keen ear of His hearing our every whisper it would be a disgrace not only to me but to my family, to my friends and an insult to my Maker to do otherwise. Men, because I sometimes take a little talking tonic and get the bad end of a bad bargain in a horse swap doesn't mean I never think serious. No sir, not by any means.

Now men, looking at this campfire and the glowing embers made from the good wood little John brought for us today has kindled the embers of my heart and put me to thinking of Jane and the brats at home, and the home fires the Missionary talked about. There's something about glowing embers around a campfire sheltered only by the canopy of heaven and Jehovah's stars, the very eyes of heaven, looking on that does a great deal more than warm a cypress log rider's cold wet feet. It touches the heart strings of the toughest of us. It warms the soul itself, the never dying spark of man, and makes it glow like the embers before us. It makes a fellow think of the folks at home and sort of wonder. It makes him want to know the truth, tell the truth and live the truth. Men, those are my sentiments right now.

Now men, honest, with such sentiments welling up and overflowing from my heart, and with the eyes of heaven twinkling a smiling welcome to us around the campfire so

silently and so gently reminding us of the watchful eye and the protecting power of Jehovah, I dare not fail to tell the truth.

Men, it's not always fried chicken, brown gravy and hot country biscuits at our house. It's not always luscious strawberries and cream at our house. It's not always golden griddle cakes floating in honey at our house. It's not always tasty pies and pound cake at out house. Neither is the matrimonial race track always clear of bumps and pitfalls where domestic loveliness rules supreme.

Now men, I sincerely hope and trust you are ready to embrace the truth, the whole truth and press it to your bosoms with love and domestic affection. Surely a little cold hard corn bread and a little cold hash washed down with plain spring water will be tasteful after a gluttonous gorge of fried chicken, brown gravy and big hot country biscuits, luscious strawberries and cream, golden griddle cakes floating in honey, all served by a lovely wife in a home where domestic loveliness rules supreme.

Men, it's like this at our house: When Jane gets mad, I get mad and we do have domestic hell.

When wave after wave of uproarious laughter subsided, the camp crew gave Uncle Bud a unanimous vote of thanks for his splendid sermon on knowing the truth, speaking the truth and living the truth and voted to hit the hay loft in Uncle Louis Jones' barn in the Hammock Field because after such a stinging rebuke no member of the crew dared to mention domestic affairs. The only thing the crew could do was to hasten off to a snug bed in the hay barn and think over Uncle Bud's timely philosophy.
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Getting Along With Wives

Dot

Matilda and I have been married about 15 years and have never had even a cross word. We found it's been easy to get along without fussing. Oh, once and awhile Matilda will get a little worried over first one thing and then another and try to grumble a little. When this happens I just walk off for a short while and all the worries are soon over. Then at other times I just pay no attention to her peevishness. Within a few minutes the clouds have passed away and everything's as sweet as David's honey in the comb.

Probably a few times during our married life I've shown a disposition to be a little peevish. When I do, Matilda always walks away and leaves me alone. Sometimes she walks off to the garden and looks things over for an hour. Sometimes she cooks one of my favorite cakes and presents me with a few large slices. Now men, this will sweeten a man's disposition about as quickly as anything. After all, a man's appetite has a lot of control over his behavior. Matilda found this out soon after we were married. Her motto is: "Men are like children, feed then well and they'll stay quiet and sweet."

By following this plan we never have any domestic unpleasantness. I just can't understand how a man and wife can live together and even occasionally have unpleasantness, or quarrels or fusses. I just cannot understand what our children would think of their parents if they heard them fussing like the proverbial cat and dog you have heard so much about.

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Getting Along With Wives

Willie

Annie and I had a distinct understanding before we were married that we would get along in peace and harmony or get a divorce. We've only been married a few years but so far we've gotten along without any cross words between us. A few times Annie has shown signs of being a little peeved when I did something she didn't like, but has always held her tongue. Hence, there was no fussing. For instance when I swapped the old gentle blind stumbling plug horse that she could ride or drive all over the community, and she did almost every time I ran a raft to the Ferry Pass, which was almost twice a month. She even plowed the garden and a small potato patch with him one time when I was off in a logging camp for two or three weeks at a time. When I brought the little gray horse home, Annie showed signs of not liking the swap but said not a word. She just up and pouted a whole week. Hence, you see when I said we never had any cross words I told the truth.

About the end of the first week after I brought the little gray horse home and he had scattered my little wagon for 300 yards through the woods and probably would have scattered my carcass over the woods like he did the wagon if I hadn't slipped out the back end of the wagon body just in the niche of time. As it was, I sat down so hard when I came out of the wagon till by back bone was driven almost up between my shoulder blade bones. While I was hopping around with the hippos and rubbing my driven-up backbone, Annie just looked at me and laughed, but said not a word. When I had gotten so I could walk a little better, Annie just walked up to me laughing and said, "My dear little Willie, you've now suffered enough, you're going to swap that horse and get one I can ride, drive and even plow if you can't stay at home, or you'll be in a worse fix than you have been." Then she laughed some more. I grinned a few dry grins but said nothing, so we never had any cross words. Then Annie brought in a platter of crisp fried chicken, brown gravy and hot country biscuits. The little gray horse was swapped and it's easy for Annie and me to get along according to the teachings of the Good Book.

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Getting Along With Wives

Peter

Pete's right, my wife and I had a definite understanding before we were married that [1] we would keep no bad company, [2] go to no places of ill repute, [3] respect each other's rights and feelings at all times, and [4] try hard to get along according to the Biblical injunction given in the Laws of Moses and in the New Testament doctrines. We've tried this for about 10 years. It worked real well for a while, but with the increase in our family it became necessary to vary the plan a little.

We are now trying out a new version of some of St. Paul's advice. The new advice is substantially as follows:

"Seeing we are compassed about with so great a bunch of boys, billy goats and bull yearlings, we lay aside every weight and sin which doth so easily beset us and try to run with patience the matrimonial race set before us, looking unto Jehovah for wisdom, patience and guidance to do the task we have brought upon ourselves and pray without ceasing for courage to put up with our so great a bunch of encompassers." So far out track has been clear of bumps and pit falls and domestic levelness has ruled supreme.

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Getting Along With Wives

Jim

Men, Mary Ann and I have gotten along lovely for about sixteen years. There's been no friction in our married life. Things have gone smoothly. This has been as easy as eating pie. On, occasionally we might have a minor misunderstanding about some insignificant matter but by using good sense such little things amount to nothing.

I've made it a rule when I see a little domestic cloud, no bigger than a man's hand, making up on the far horizon, I just pick up my hat and walk off to the woods to hunt a bee tree, or maybe to look after the cattle or hogs. You know I've located several bee trees that yielded large quantities of honey by following the worker bees from the flowers about the yard. It's absolutely true that bees fly in a direct line from the last flower visited toward their home. They sometimes travel a mile or more in search of honey producing flowers. It's easy to tell when they have a load and start toward home.

Men, when I get a little worried over some little trifle, Mary Ann pays no attention to me. Usually she walks off to look after a bunch of young chickens or maybe to dress a fat fryer for supper or dinner as the case may be. Sometimes she'll slip out and bake a supply of fresh peach tarts, my favorite pie, and then hand me a few as a surprise. No, my wife and I have never had any domestic trouble. We agreed when we started out as man and wife to live above the fussy quarreling riff raff trash of the country. So far we have lived up to our agreement one hundred percent.

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Getting Along With Wives

George

Kate and I get along pretty well. We have never had a fuss or a quarrel during our married life. Oh, Kate sometimes orders me around a great deal but I pay no attention to her. If I want to do what I'm told to do, I do it and if I don't want to obey orders I just pay no attention to her and say nothing.

If I want Kate to do something for me she will listen with great attention and then go and do just as she pleases and I say nothing. If she obeys, all is well. If she doesn't, it's alright. We never fuss, quarrel or fight. We get along fine and all is a sweet as the Psalmist's honey at our house.

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Meanest Prank

Willie

Sometime about the first of June, two years ago, Martin, the miller at the McCaskill Mill, begged me for several days to go fishing with him down in the river swamp on the Campbell Lake and some other nearby sloughs. Martin, as you fellows know, is an Englishman and fishes like he calls the "English way," by using a casting rod and reel and a plug or a live minnow for bait to catch big trout, bass or large fighting goggle-eyes. Along toward the middle of the month we, Martin and I, started out early one morning to try out hand. Martin carried his usual tackle and I carried my little cane pole, a small line and a can of flathead worms taken from under the bark on some dead saw-log tops.

We began fishing near the Campbell Lake boat landing and fished down the lake. Uncle Harve's boat was at the landing and I had gotten his key just in case we might want to fish any out in the main river. By the time we had fished a quarter of a mile down the lake I had caught half a dozen bream and two large goggle-eyes. Martin reported a few strikes but had caught nothing. He thought the fish striking were too small for his plug.

He now moved a little further down the slough. Martin picked out a good casting place and I selected a little lazy cove with a lazy log seat. Martin began casting and landing his plug on the opposite side of the slough. I placed a big flathead on my hook and dropped it down beside a big sunken log. As it sank, a whale of a goggle-eye swallowed it. As I pulled in my fish, Martin hollowed that he had hooked a ten or twelve pound trout and was having a whale of a lot of English sport playing him down for a safe landing. I walked over to see the whale of a lot of sport. Just before I got there his hook hung in some small limbs near the opposite shore of the slough. Martin declared that three times the ten pound fish had jumped clear of the water and then dived into the blasted old tree top. Martin and I tried at length to get the line loose but with no success.

Martin now asked for the key to Uncle Harve's boat so he could go get it for use in getting across the slough to get his tackle loose from the tree top. The keys were given to Martin and off he went. I went back to my fishing. While waiting for a bite I thought about crossing the slough about a hundred yards below where we were fishing and filching the ten pound fish from Martin's tackle and placing on it one of my big goggle-eyes just to tease him a little. About this time a small bream was pulled out on my hook. While taking it off it occurred to me that it would do just as well as one of my big goggle-eyes. So off with it I trotted. Martin's tackle was found hung in shallow water, not more than two feet deep. I pulled the limbs above the water, removed a two or three pound trout and placed the little bream on his tackle and let the limb sink back into the water. The trout was then carried back and tied in the water near my lazy cove. My fishing was resumed. When Martin came with the boat I went and assisted him in getting the ten pound fish and his English tackle from the limbs. The boat was managed by me while he attended the fish and tackle.

When Martin pulled the little bream above the water he was a gloomy looking man. Death itself would appear brighter. The corners of his mouth dropped down like broken wings on a rooster that had been whipped in a big cockfight. His eyes showed sad disappointment. My face probably showed as much gloominess and sadness as did his, not because of my sympathy for the loss of his ten pound fish, but because of the mean trick I had played in filching his fish. Martin soon recovered enough to breathe halfway normal.

We returned to our side of the slough. Martin laid his tackle on the shore and started back with the boat. I returned to my fishing and to meditating over the mean trick I had played on my good English friend. I really had intended to give the trout to him but when he swore dozens of times the trout on his tackle, that cleared the water three times and dived into the tree top, weighed ten or twelve pounds, I just couldn't make him out such a liar by handing him the little three pound fish. Men, I just couldn't hurt his feelings like that. I just hung the little trout on a big flathead and called Martin to come and help me land a big trout. Martin came and lent lots of assistance. When the little trout was landed, Martin laughed at me for calling for assistance to land such a little yearling trout. "Why" said he, "The big one that got on my tackle weighted five or six times as much as that minnow." There was nothing I could say without fracturing our friendship.

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Meanest Prank

Bud

Men, as I sit here around this glowing campfire burning so bright with the good wood little John over there brought for us this evening I've been wondering if some of you fellows didn't do a little shore-enough stealing under the disguise of prankish tricks. If it wasn't stealing it was bordering on the twilight of plain thievery. Men, I don't mean to be hard on any of you, not nearly as hard as you've been on yourselves. You know you've told some awful things on yourselves here tonight. Frankly, men, I just don't quite understand how you can tell such things around such a friendly campfire with nothing between your heads and heaven but the stars and their twinkling eyes all wide open gazing straight down on us. Men, you haven't pulled the wool over Jehovah's all-seeing eyes or stuffed cotton in his ever listening ears. I just wanted to remind you of this right now.

Men, I've been thinking hard since Dot over there told about stealing that gallon of the finest oysters ever lifted from the blue waters of Escambia Bay, trying to figure out how he has been able to live with himself since he did this and calls it a prankish trick. That wasn't a prank or a trick but just a plain triple crime and will some day carry triple punishment. He betrayed the confidence of friends and took advantage of a bunch of gullible people and took their oysters. However, he taught them a lasting lesson in human behavior. After all, it goes to show just how resourceful a hungry river hand can be when caught in a tight.

And Willie over there, he's a neighbor and kinsman having married into our family. I never dreamed he would filch a fish from even his worst enemy if he has one, much less from his best friend. That was premeditated fish filching. If it wasn't then why did he bring them boat keys with him on this fishing trip? After all, it just goes to show what a good fisherman will do when caught in a tight.

And George over yonder is also my neighbor and kinsman, he too having married into my family. Fellows, if the younger generation of my family doesn't use better judgment in marrying than some of the older ones, there's no telling what our family may soon come to. Men, I just can't for the life of me figure out how George can sit here right in front of his own boy Pete and laugh about prankish tricks he and his chums played on innocent folks and at the same time admit he and his chums were in grave danger of being court-martialed and shot or of being tried by civil courts for murder. If his boy goes to the dogs, George can blame no one but himself. Men, this was premeditated meanness for the sole purpose of getting an opportunity to laugh at innocent folks and watch them die right before their eyes or stampede them and laugh at their moans as they tore up valuable forests committing suicide. Men, it just goes to show how low down many good men, brave and true, may become after serving a spell in the army.

And Pete over here by me, George's own boy, is also my kinsman. But men, I shore can't help it. Many of us thought once he would become a useful and well respected citizen. That's why I'm so shocked at what he calls a prankish trick. That wasn't a prank at all. It was what the lawyers call a premeditated design to affect the death of a human being. There's no doubt about it, Pete really planned to see that boy's head butted wide open. Suppose that lad when butted down by that plank fence had attempted to get up with his head pointed the other way? Why it would have caught the full force of that pile-driver blow and been scattered over that ox lot like the shell of a dry gourd when struck with a sledge hammer. This lad was too popular. Jealousy is treacherous. Men, think for a moment of Pete's trickery and chicanery to entice this innocent lad to lay two bits on the gate post to get his own brains, if he had any, butted out. It just goes to show how low down jealousy will go when caught in a tight.

And Pete over there, I never thought he would admit such crimes under the disguise of playing a prankish trick on any one, and especially right before his own small boy. Little John over here is real smart for an eight year old boy. You men know that from the way he brings us wood and makes such good fires and the way he paddles that boat in these flood waters. But with all that, what, I ask; can he look forward to when he has to spend twenty one years with that sort of a daddy? Just think of the designing Peter did to get that boy under that bush on a big moccasin coiled in a striking position and too, right at the front door of the home of thousands of the truest javelin hurlers that ever punctured my carcass. Either one was enough to make even a boy or a man having good sense jump into the river and drown himself. This was almost murder twice under the name of a prankish trick. Then the worst of all after rescuing the boy he was held in slavery and made to pole that clamp of logs and give Peter a pleasure ride. After all it just goes to show what it takes to make some fellows understand they must earn their bread by the sweat of their brow when caught in a tight.

And Jim over here by me, he's a good fellow and the best neighbor I ever had. I love him like a brother. But after all that, he's really committed three crimes, namely; withholding information from a fellow hunter, taking a fine big turkey from right over his head in the stilly hours of the morning and tricking an innocent turkey to a tragic death. After all it just goes to show what the best turkey hunter in the south will do when caught in a tight.

Now men, after this little bit of jollity, you seemingly have enjoyed as much as the prankish tricks you admit playing, I'm going to tell you about the lowest down thing I ever did, but I'm telling the truth and calling it low down plain stealing and not a prankish trick, filching or pilfering. While sitting around this friendly fire and the stars looking down on our heads right from the gates of the starry heavens I dare not tell anything but the truth, the whole truth with no reservations of back-stepping. This lowest down thing happened while I was living up on Pea River in Alabama. It happened like this:

A friend and I had been down in Florida on a little visit and were returning to our homes on Pea River east of Andalusia. We had left Florida early Saturday morning and traveled on foot up the Old Three Notch Road. We spent the night at the home of a friend on the

Conecuh River a little south and west of Andalusia. Sunday morning we got off about the middle of the morning and walked carrying our baggage on a hot July Sunday until about the middle of the afternoon when we passed by a farm and saw some fine looking watermelons in a field some distance from the fence and nearly two hundred yards from the house. They looked good to us.

We had eaten a late breakfast and had not gotten hungry until we saw them watermelons. By the time we got around on the back side of that field we were almost starved to death. The thoughts of eating a good watermelon made us conscious of our empty stomachs. Suddenly we discovered we were also tired and hot too. The temptation to steal was fast getting the better of our good judgment. We strolled off to a cool shade to rest and let the devil persuade us to steal some watermelons to satisfy our hunger, and incidentally help us to hold out to walk the other ten miles home. Within ten minutes we had hidden our baggage a quarter of a mile from the field down near a spring branch and were on our way around the field looking for a way to get a melon each without being seen. After crawling on our hands and knees for two hundred yards behind an old split rail fence we found the only way we could get to the melons without exposing ourselves to the folks at the home and possibly to a sprinkling of musket shot was to make a slip-gap at the bottom of the rail fence and then crawl through it for nearly a hundred yards on our stomach between potato ridges. We sat and pondered whether we should take the chance of dragging our empty bellies up between sweet potato ridges for a melon or risk winning a race with starvation ten miles from home.

Pretty soon my partner in crime lifted a corner of the fence. I stuck two pine knots in the proper cracks and pulled aside the ends of two rails. In we crawled and began the slow torturing process of worming our way to the melon patch. Before we had gotten half way we were as wet with hot sweat as if we had been wallowing in a shallow open pond at midday in August. There wasn't a dry thread on our clothes. We were smeared with red clay, scratched and scarred with Alabama sand rocks, our clothes colored pink and our bodies stinging all over from the sap or juice we had mashed from the Red Drake sweet potato vines as we crawled and wormed our way by inches. Before we got to the end of the ridges we wanted to turn back but found the rows too close together for us to turn around without raising our heads up. We were afraid to do this lest we hear the sound of musketry and feel the cooling effects of flying lead. We just had to go to the end of the rows to get behind a small patch of tall corn to turn around. This brought us to the melons.

After resting a few minutes we each selected a melon and began the slow torturing process of worming our way back to the slip-gap. Worming our way up the rows was bad enough but the going back was a thousand times worse. Those melons refused to roll. They had to be pushed over a rough sand rock or a hard red clay clod every six inches. By the time we got the melons through the slip-gap our clothing was ruined with that clay and the pink juices from the Red Drake potato vines. We had been forced several times to roll over on our backs to rest our bruised and burning bellies. Our bodies were stinging all over as if we had rolled in a bed of wild bull nettles. Men, we were a hurrah to look at and felt worse than old "Git out."

We put on our hats, picked up the melons and slipped away to out baggage. We took the baggage and melons to a nearby branch. We washed our faces and hands and otherwise cleaned up the best we could. Then we pulled out our large pocket knives to cut the melons and enjoy our well earned feast. Within fifteen minutes we had broken both blades of our knives off in the melons. We then began working on them melons with big lightered knots and limbs but never cracked the rinds in a single place. We then in disgust kicked what we afterwards learned was two large citron melons at the toughest stages under some bushes, picked up our baggage and started homeward. Physically we were starved and stove up. Spiritually, we were down and outers. Instead of arriving home at 5:00 in the evening we did well to get there by ten that night. Truly my partner in crime and I had done a low down stealing stunt and in doing it we had imitated the cold blooded slimy snake that temped our mother, Eve, in the garden and brought us to the very brink of perdition. We thought we were now in it heels over head.

Out wives and friends refused to believe our explanation for coming home in the fix we were in and accused us of having gotten on a drunken spree and spending the night falling in red clay muddy puddles and rolling on beds of bull nettles and wild pink herbs.

After all, it just goes to show how low down two good hungry men may become when they get caught in a tight.

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Meanest Prank

George

Men, when I was in the Confederate Calvary, our company was assigned to patrol duty to aid in protecting railroads leading into Montgomery, Al., from the ports of Mobile, Al., and Pensacola, Fl., and transportation on the Alabama River. For six months or longer we were stationed at a cavalry military camp sixty or seventy miles south and a little east of Montgomery beside a big springhead near which several much used roads converged to pass between two creeks forming the headwaters of two larger streams. All the travel from a large area south and east of this place toward Montgomery or toward the Alabama River passed over the ridge near this springhead.

Out company was divided into several squads of approximately twenty men and each squad was assigned to patrol certain roads and areas each day to intercept Federal Agents traveling through the country seeding information for military purposes and to destroy bridges and ferries on transportation lines to Montgomery. Each squad was also looking for small bands of Union Soldiers slipping into the country to seize food supplies being transported toward Montgomery to be sent from there to aid in feeding the Confederate Army. For this reason each squad traveled well armed.

Many Negro men and boys of the late teenage years were constantly passing back and forth by our camp. Many white men too old for military duty and boys too young for such service also traveled the road leading by our camp and close around the springhead. We soon discovered all the Negroes and many of the whites were suspicious of men in uniform, especially when they were armed or on the march. They were always shying away from any group of soldiers and ready to run from any suspicious looking object or upon hearing strange sounds.

Two prankish young men were in my squad who on several occasions had slipped out at night and made ghost-like appearances beside this road to see a group of Negroes stampede down this road a short distance and then tear up the woods searching for hiding places. On two occasions I had taken my own bunk linen and gone out on the road with these prankish rascals and enjoyed the sight of seeing several groups of Negroes and a few white folks tear up the roads and the woods stampeding from a white sheet ghost.

Not long after such an experience one of the prankish soldiers came in one night and wanted me to assist in making a jack-o-lantern face on opposite sides of a sugar barrel the two of them had brought from the storeroom and otherwise dressed it up as a ghost. The two prankish rascals and I went to work and in about an hour had the most frightful looking artificial ghost ever seen or heard of in the country. Here is what we did:

A hole about fifteen inches square was sawed on opposite sides of the barrel. A human face was cut on thick cardboard, showing a wide mean looking mouth full of fierce looking teeth, and a pair of big wild looking eyes and nostrils as if breathing fire. A piece

of such cardboard was then fastened tight over each opening in the barrel. A thin greasy sheet of pink colored paper was pasted over the cardboard and an improvised light placed on shelving in the barrel to hold the light exactly opposite the faces. Holes then were cut on each side of the barrel for use in tying a vine for raising and lowering the ghost. A small stout rod seven or eight feet long, about the size of a fishing pole, was then fastened to the bottom of the barrel to serve as outstretched arms. One of the men then ripped a pair of his well worn drawers apart and a leg of them was placed on each end of this rod for sleeves.

A bunk sheet or a light colored blanket was then fastened around the edges of the bottom of the barrel for the upper part of the skirt or robe. The second sheet or blanket was then fastened to the first one making the long white robe approximately fifteen feet long. A hoop four or five feet in diameter was made by using a section of wild grape vine cut from the springhead and fastened inside the robe where the sheets were joined together, making it a real hooped robe.

To proper display this artificial ghost, several sections of wild bullis vines were spliced together making a hoisting rope nearly a hundred feet long. One end of it was then passed over a limb 30 feet high on a stooping tree growing beside the springhead and leaning toward the road, not over twenty feet away, and the barrel was fastened to the end directly under the limb. The other end was fastened in a thick clump of bushes fifty or sixty feet back beside the springhead. A second bullis vine rope was fastened to the hoop in the skirt for use in giving the long white robe the spooky, shaking, shivering appearance of a real spiritual ghost hovering around the last resting place of its departed body.

Men, when this artificial ghost was slowly raised in the darkness of night beside the road as if coming from the thick swampy springhead and the long white robe began to shake and shiver accompanied by the mournful moans of the greatest prankster ever in the country, the Negroes and white folks and even the bravest of hardened soldiers stampeded at the first sight.

We three played pranks with this artificial ghost for a few hours each night for two dark nights when traveling was thickest. Almost all individuals and groups stampeded at the first sight. Only approximately ten percent went on the even tenor of their way after seeing it. A few fell to the ground and began praying by begging forgiveness and promising to go straight if given another chance, while others fell to the ground and lay speechless for five or ten minutes. In such cases the ghost was lowered to its hiding place in the thick clump of bushes, otherwise they might not have recovered enough to run. We had plenty of fun to more than repay us for remodeling the sugar barrel and dressing it up. We also leaned a lot about human nature and human behavior.

After the second night the remodeled sugar barrel was destroyed lest we three be court-martialed and shot or tried for murder when some timid person died of sheer fright or stampeded against a tree and committed suicide.

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Meanest Prank

Jim

It was during the late 1870's and shortly after that I moved to the old place at the head of Wolf Pen Branch near Rocky Hill Pass that I did a pretty mean trick. At the time I was sawing a few logs down on Moore's Creek between the upper waste way and the head of the creek. I usually went to and from the woods by way of the Old Sand Mount Trail. One evening on the way home when I was between Hammock Head and Sand Mount the confound biggest gobbler I ever saw and one turkey hen slowly trotted across the trail only a short distance ahead of me. I stood and looked at them for a few seconds. It was almost roosting time. It occurred to me if I could make them fly up and light in different places I might get that confounded gobbler about daylight the next morning. Immediately I tore out at full speed after the turkeys. Soon I began to bark like a good hunting dog on a hot trail. Pretty soon the hen rose and flew off toward White Water Branch, a little to my left. The chase after the gobbler was continued with a little more speed and barking a little louder. The gobbler now turned down the branch and two or three hundred yards from where the hen flew into the air the confounded gobbler took to the air and sailed off like he meant to light in the top of some tall pines across the branch a short distance from where he passed out of my sight.

This was seemingly alright for my turkey hunt the next morning. This gave me a splendid good chance to get the biggest gobbler of the season. I now returned to the place where the hen had taken to her wings and picked out a good hiding place for use the next morning when I was certain the gobbler would come back there searching for the hen. Soon a place was located. I then started back toward home.

As I crossed an old log road leading down to the old waste way on Holly Mill Creek at the fork of the creek and White Water Branch, a man living two or three miles away, whom I didn't like at all, was seen coming up the road from the fork of the branch and creek on horseback. He hailed me. I waited for him. This man spent much time hunting. I suspected he had seen or heard that confounded gobbler light down near the branch and made up my mind to say nothing about seeing or chasing the turkeys. When he approached, after friendly greetings, he informed me that he thought he had heard a turkey light in a tree a short distance down the branch and wanted to know if I had been turkey hunting and if I had a dog with me or had seen one run down the branch. My reply was pretty short. He was informed that I had been sawing logs all day and had no dog and showed him my dinner bucket. He replied that he had heard a dog barking over toward the branch and had heard a noise like that made by a big gobbler's wings taking up for a light in the tops of some tall pines over there about the branch. With this we each continued on our way home.

After supper that night I got my gun ready for shooting that big gobbler early the next morning. The next morning, way before day, I was on the way to my hiding place to get the gobbler. When I crossed the old log road two hundred yards from the hiding place selected, I stopped near it to see if the man who had accosted me the evening before

about the turkey would pass down this road to where he heard the gobbler light. After waiting approximately fifteen minutes I heard his horse coming trotting down the road. After he passed near me, I followed a short distance behind him down the road to see if he left the road and headed over toward where the turkey had lighted. As I expected, he rode off from the road toward the turkey a few yards, dismounted, tied his horse to a sapling and continued toward the branch on foot. I then returned to my hiding place to wait for the confounded gobbler to begin his early morning gobbling.

Approximately half an hour before daylight the old rascal gobbled a couple of times. The air was cool and crisp. The gobbles were loud and rolled and echoed among the hills and pine trees different from any I had ever heard before. The rolling, echoing and re-echoing as the sounds bounced off Sand Mount made sweet music for the ears of turkey hunters. This was worth all the time and energy spent trying to get this gobbler, even if I failed to bag him. These first gobbles were not answered. Within fifteen minutes the sound of the loud gobbling again began to echo among the hills and pines. Soon I began answering the old rascal just occasionally. As day began to break, his gobbles were answered more frequently and a little louder. Then soon they were answered only at intervals and not so loud to make him fly across the branch and as near my hiding place as possible before coming to the ground. As streaks of light began to show among the tall pines a gobble was heard that indicated the big fellow was getting restless on his tall perch and was about ready to fly to the ground. His gobble was answered in several different tones and faintly to trick the old big tom of the woods to understand that the flock was getting further away for his perch, hoping to cause him to fly from his high roosting place not only across the branch out of sight of the other hunter but as far away from him as possible.

Only a few such yelps were given before I heard the usual take off sounds of the wild turkey and then the flopping of the big broad wings to rise above the tall pines and get up speed for a long sail before lighting. I stood almost breathless listening and looking for the big gobbler to light, strut a few steps and gobble as is their custom. Within a minute or two the swish of big wings was heard directly over my head. I looked and saw the long broad wings spread wide, taking the big bird up for an easy light and his long legs and huge drum sticks already pushed forward in a lighting position. A perfect landing was made.

The old tom of the woods turned his head toward White Water Branch as if looking for the flock of turkeys he had heard answering his calls, stretched his neck and sounded a roaring gobble as if saying, “I’m here.” He then spread his long silky tail feathers forming a beautiful disk fully four feet in diameter and dragged the long pinions of his mighty wings on the ground imitating the roar of distant thunder. The sight and sound of this might bird of the wild caused me to hesitate for a moment to enjoy their magical charms. Then I thought that if I don’t shoot, the other may. The trigger was pulled and the thirty seven pound monarch of turkeydom was sacked and carried beyond Sand Mount before day finished breaking.

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Meanest Prank

Peter

Several years ago I was assisting Mr. W. J. Williams to float some cypress logs from the swamp during a freshet in the river and raft the logs ready for carrying them to market. This work was being done when everybody in the community was trying to get a few cypress logs from the swamp into the main river before the flood waters went down. Every man in the community who could cut cypress logs, ride a floating log in swift water, raft logs or paddle a boat in flood waters was persuaded to hoof it off to the cypress swamp.

Mr. Williams had two of the Carnley boys who were good helpers. He had a young man about twenty one years old helping who was only a visitor in the community. This fellow had never worked on floating logs or timber. He was afraid of the swift flood waters although he could swim. He was afraid to stand on a log and use a crosscut saw or a chopping ax. He was afraid to try to paddle the boat lest it turn over in swift deep water where he would be unable to swim to the shore. He was afraid to get out in the cypress swamp where he would be out of sight of land. He was afraid of the big river where he thought the big whorls would suck him deep beneath the surface where he would be certain to drown in the struggle to get loose from the twisting whorls.

As soon as we had logs enough in the deep eddy water of Williams Lake to begin rafting them, I was assigned to this job and the young water-scared fellow was sent to help me. I worried with him all day but got no help from him. He was worse than a timid goat about getting into the water. He just wouldn't get his feet wet. He was afraid to get on a clamp of logs after the logs had the binders fastened down with strong oak pins. His excuse was a log might roll and cause him to shift under the raft where he would be certain to drown before he could get from under it.

The second day I made up my mind to trick the old boy into a good ducking. Early in the morning we killed a large cottonmouth moccasin and threw it back under some bushes. Soon I sent the old boy off two hundred yards to bring an armful of pin wood. While he was gone I moved the dead moccasin under the roots of a partially washed up bush near the top of a steep slanting bank down which I expected to see the fellow slide into the river and placed it in a striking position. About the time I got the snake properly placed I noticed a nest of yellow jackets under the washed up roots of the bush and observed the bugs were getting ready to attack me. Of course I moved quickly and at once decided not to let the nest be disturbed until later in the day when the hot sun would be shining directly on them so they would be ready for a battle with any thing coming near the nest.

When the old boy returned with the pin wood I kept trying to get a little help out of him on various little jobs like bringing binders on the clamps of logs after I had them poled together and tied and also bringing pin wood. In fact we went out in the swamp and

sawed several blocks of pin wood just to keep him from disturbing the yellow jackets until they were warm enough to bounce the old boy down the bluff into the river. About two o'clock in the afternoon I asked him to come and help me pole a clamp of logs a few yards up beside the bank where it could be tied to a tall bush out of the way of the clamps we were trying to finish and couple them with this one. He refused to come on the logs. I then asked him to go near the bush under which the moccasin and the yellow jackets were located and to catch the rope as soon as I could throw it to him and show him where to tie it. The end of the rope was purposely thrown a little below the bush so the old boy would have to take it and approach the bush as the right place to disturb the yellow jackets.

The trick worked. The old boy caught the end of the rope and reached up to tie it to the bush. Purposely I had let the clamp drift away to tighten the rope. I yelled at him to grab the bush with one hand and pull hard so as to get plenty of rope to tie around the stout body of the bush. When he pulled on the limbs of the bush, loose dirt fell all over the nest of yellow jackets. He was watching the raft as it floated toward the bank ten feet away. I yelled for him to pull harder. He did so and at the second jerk on the bush the outer guard of yellow jackets on the nest struck the old boy with a few hundred sharp javelins. He yelled and jumped on the slick bank and shot down it like a greased ell.

He struck the water yelling and fighting bugs with both hands and with so much force until he went fifteen feet from the bank and ten feet deep before he could take up to scramble toward the surface. All the time he was under the water he thought he was under the clamp of logs. Instead of trying to come to the surface he headed up stream to get from under the clamp. When he shot into the water I quickly pushed the logs away from the bank. When he came to the surface he was twenty feet above where the logs were and the same distance from the bank. He had knocked his hat off against the limbs when the first javelins pierced the back of his neck thus making it possible for the bugs to cover his bushy head. When he came up many bugs were still in his hair and began to sting as soon as they were out of the water.

I knew the bugs were too wet to fly, so I threw the end of the rope to him at the same time telling him to hold to it and I would pull him on the clamp of logs. Thus I was able to get him on the logs. When he had slapped the wet bugs from his head and clothes I gave him the pole and had him pole the clamp around in the eddy water a little as a means of "Breaking him in." The trick worked. The ice had been broken. The old boy was now harness-wise.

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Meanest Prank

Dot

Two or three years ago Arnold Cooper and old man Scheltz and I each carried a raft of logs to the Ferry Pass for the Skinner Mill down near the P & A railroad bridge across the Escambia Bay. When we arrived at the Ferry Pass about noon on Friday we found four men there who had brought rafts from near Luverne in Alabama. Only one of these men had made this river trip before. The men were wide eyed with curiosity and as gullible as goslings. They had hired a man to take them to Floridatown where they planned to camp that night and probably remain over Saturday and go home by walking up the old Three Notch Military Road on Saturday afternoon and Sunday.

These men had heard much about salt water in the gulf and bays but had never believed it possible for that much water to be salted. They were taking the trip across the bay for the purpose of seeing and tasting the water to determine for themselves if the story they had heard about the saltiness of the sea water was true. And too they had heard about a certain fish enclosed in a hinged shell a little like the box turtle they had seen and a certain flat fish that had lain flat on the sea bottom until both eyes were now on the same side of its head. They planned to see both of these curious kinds of fish Friday afternoon and Saturday morning before heading out up the old Three Notch Road about noon on Saturday.

Since Cooper, Scheltz and I had brought logs from the Skinner Mill it was necessary for us to go to the mill to get our money. As soon as our logs were measured we took a copy of the specification prepared by the inspectors and hoofed it down to the mill. By the middle of the afternoon we had our money and were ready to head for home. After discussing the matter of the journey home it was agreed to cross the bay to Floridatown and hoof it home that night provided we could get across the bay before dark. Mr. Skinner heard us discussing the matter of getting across the bay and offered to send a man from his log boom with a rowboat to take us to Floridatown. We accepted his offer and were there an hour or more before sunset.

When we arrived at Floridatown we found our gullible friends wading knee deep along the shore, each carrying a long sharp stick and searching for some of “Them flat fish with both eyes on one side of his head.” When we landed they waded ashore and talked to us while we were getting our rafting equipment ready for traveling. Cooper explained to these men they needed to search for the ‘flat fish’ by using a bright torch light after dark.

Soon we had our equipment ready for heading up the Old Indian Trading Trail winding along the fringes of the swamps and hammocks adjacent to the river. As we swung our rafting equipment and camping outfits on our shoulders and started off, one of the men requested me to come out by his camping place and look at some shellfish given to his party by someone in a fishing boat as they crossed the bay. I told Cooper and Scheltz to wait for me at the spring near the Jackson Oak and I then accompanied the man to his

camping place. Upon arrival at his camp he showed me a corn sack containing approximately a bushel and a half of oysters.

While admiring his sack of fine oysters, the man explained that neither he nor any of his partners had ever seen any shellfish before and did not know how to dress them for making a pot of soup for supper. He then added, “We can wash them clean on the outside but don’t know how to gut them.”

Immediately I decided that this was a good opportunity for me to get a gallon bucket, I carried one with my camping outfit, full of oysters just for the opening, so I kindly offered to gut his oysters for the guts to carry home for chicken feed. My kind offer was accepted with many thanks. My big stout pocket knife was then taken from my pocket and the job of opening oysters begun. While I was filling my bucket with oysters the other three gullible men walked up to camp and were delighted with the bargain their partner had made. Soon my bucket was full and I had opened less than half of the oysters, having picked out only the largest and finest ones. I then explained that it was necessary for me to go in order to overtake my companions before dark. I then picked up my rafting equipment and camping outfit and walked off with a gallon of the finest oysters ever lifted from the blue waters of the Escambia Bay, and left my gullible friends preparing to make their first oyster stew by boiling a pot of oyster shells.

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Meanest Prank

Pete

Men, about a year ago one evening just before sunset when I drove Van's log team up to the feed lot at his home I noticed Aunt Drusilla Carnley's old black sheep was in the feed lot standing with his fore feet up on one of the feed troughs and his head down in the trough as if trying to lick a little feed from the corners. I knew it would be a problem to feed the oxen with that old butting sheep in the lot. I also knew it was dangerous to enter the lot and undertake to drive him out as long as he was interested in licking either feed or salt from that trough.

While I was looking at the situation, a plow boy Van had hired only a week or so before came from the horse lot, having just placed his plow horse in a stable and fed him. The boy was twenty or twenty one years old, weighted approximately 140 pounds and was very much a smart aleck. As he came walking around the ox lot wise cracking, it occurred to me a few blows from that sheep might do the old boy a lot of good by bumping some of the conceit out of his system. So I asked him to help me drive that sheep from the lot. He began laughing at me and wise cracking about my wanting help to drive a little sheep from a lot. "Why," said he, "Any little child could do a thing like that and here you are, a grown man asking for help." When he got through laughing and wise cracking at me about wanting help, the young smart aleck offered to bet two bits he could drive that sheep from the lot in two minutes or catch him and toss him over the fence. His offered was accepted and the two quarters were placed on the gate post.

The lot gate was opened wide and the young fellow walked in to drive the innocent looking little sheep from the lot. He walked straight up behind the sheep. I thought he intended to catch him before his head was lifted from the trough. However, instead of catching the sheep, the boy kicked him gently in the flank as he yelled at the sheep, "Get out, you black rascal." Instead of getting out, the black rascal backed off a few feet and charged at the boy knocking him sprawling in the lot. The boy wasn't hurt but got up furiously mad and began looking for a stick or club for use in making the sheep leave the lot.

While he was looking for a club and uttering threats about what he was going to do to the sheep, the ram again butted him sprawling. This time he got up as if badly hurt. After rubbing a badly bruised knee he started limping toward the lot fence. Just before getting to the fence the ram landed another blow downing the boy. This time he was badly stunned as if the breath had been partially bumped from him. He was slow to rise. In the meantime the ram had backed off for a pile driver blow. As the smart aleck was scrambling to his feet, three feet from the fence, the ram struck him full force and drove the old boy through the fence head first, breaking one four inch board and ripping another one off the post. The old boy lay rubbing his bruises while the sheep returned to his trough licking. It was a little rough on the old boy but it really helped him by bumping the rough edges off his wise cracks and braggadocios style.

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Fishing Stories

Willie's Fish Story

One spring about seven or eight years ago the river had been at flood stage all through March and April so rafts of big cypress logs floated from the swamps during the freshet could not be carried down the river to market. About the first of May the river got down within its banks so logs could be floated to market. I ran two rafts to the Ferry Pass Landing. While running the second raft I saw more fish jumping in the river than I had ever seen on one trip. This put me to thinking about going fishing. The more I thought about the fishing the more I wanted to go and try my luck. It had occurred to me that during the long spell of high water the fish population had increased so that all the fishing places were well supplied. Then the thought came to me that the first person to fish after the river got down would get the best and biggest fish. Right then and there I decided to be one among the first to fish after the river got low enough to get to the fishing places.

I got back home late Friday night. Saturday morning before breakfast I rigged up a pole and line for bream fishing and a few set hooks for catfish. As soon as breakfast was over I took my tackle, my old shotgun and a can for carrying the bait and headed for Campbell Lake and a few other sloughs or lakes as they were sometimes called. On the way I skinned the bark from a burned down pine tree and got a can full of flat head worms. At the edge of the swamp I shot a jaybird and a sapsucker for use as catfish bait.

The catfish hooks were baited and set in a narrow part of Campbell Lake. I then took my pole and line and walked down the lake a few yards looking for a good place to drop my hook into the water. Soon an inviting looking cove was found and the fishing started. Within half an hour I had a dozen big bream, and I mean big ones too. The pole and line were now laid aside while I went back to look after my set hooks. To my surprise I had half a dozen big blue channel catfish weighting about three pounds each. The catfish and the bream were now placed on a string and tied in a cool protected place at the edge of the lake.

I fished about half and hour or longer and caught eight or ten more big bream. I then looked at me set hooks and took another half of a dozen big catfish from them. After stringing and staking my fish in the water I went half a mile to a good spring for water. Upon returning I went farther down the lake to what was considered the best place in the lake for catching big fish. Within an hour, fifteen of the biggest bream I had ever seen caught from this area had been landed. These were now carried back to where my set hooks were located. Three more big catfish and one large soft shell turtle were taken from the hooks. Since I now had as much as I could carry home, the hooks were taken out of the water and the lines rolled up preparatory for going home.

Within fifteen minutes my fishing tackle, old shot gun, fish and turtle were assembled and ready for the homeward start. Men, if I didn't have about all I could get up the big hill with. I was home a little after twelve and had fish cleaned and cooked for dinner. After the fish and turtle were cleaned Annie carried her parents enough for two or three good meals. We then had fried fish, stewed fish, sand turtle soup for three or four days. Men, I sure had figured out the meaning of so many fish jumping in the river around my raft. Each of the first few persons to fish that spring after the river went down had no trouble in catching plenty of fish. Since this experience I try to be the first person to go fishing after a long freshet in the river. It's about the only time I have any luck.

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The Sunday school lesson was about the parables. After carefully explaining the parables mentioned in the lesson the teacher asked a class of three small boys if they understood the parables now and what they really meant. The boys all replied, "Yes." She then asked the boys to tell her which parable they liked best. After a few moments she received these answers:

1. I like the one where somebody loafs and fishes.
2. I like the one where the net got full and running over with fishes.
3. The third hesitated, scratched his head as if trying to think of another parable pertaining to fish. Suddenly his eyes sparkled, his hand was lowered and the teacher received this reply; I like the one that got mixed up with Jonah and proved that the world can't keep a good man down.

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Jim's Fish Story

One summer along about 1875 after I'd been rafting logs down the river all the spring running them to the Ferry Pass, I took malaria fever. I was down with it for three weeks. I'd eaten so much chicken broth till a spoon full of it was like taking a dose of medicine. Fried chicken had also lost its taste. Fresh vegetables had begun to taste like quinine. I had gotten a little better, had missed a fever for a few days, when I began to want a feed of fish fried right on the bank of the river. It seemed like a good square feed of freshwater fish cooked and eaten right after being pulled from the river would cure me. That was the way I had felt for three of four days. By Saturday morning it seemed I just had to get up and go to the river and try my luck at fishing, and in the event my luck was good, cook and eat them right beside the river.

Saturday morning my desire for fish got so intense I could no longer resist. I got a couple of poles, lines, a few hooks and a can of bait. Mary Ann got up a little can of lard, some meal, a little ground coffee, a half gallon bucket to boil coffee in and a pan to use for frying the fish. She cooked some old time corn bread to carry with us to be warmed and

sort of smother fried after the fish were taken from the pan. You know this would give the bread a good flavor as well as warm it.

A little after sunrise we set out for the old dead river log landing where I had a good row boat and where there were a number of crystal clear springs flowing from under the step bluff nearby. I managed the walk to the river fairly well but was too tired to travel up and down the river banks to fish or to wade half a leg deep in the swamp fishing in the swamp sloughs or lakes as they were sometimes called. Hence, we got into the row boat and paddled out to the main river. We then fished up one side of the river for more than an hour, getting nearly half a mile from the mouth of the old dead river. We then crossed over to the other side and fished back to the dead river. By this time we had thirty seven big fine bream, some war mouth big fellows, some big goggle-eye, and a number of sun bream. We now headed into the dead river and back to the landing, arriving there about noon.

Ten of the choicest bream were selected to fry for dinner and the others were staked out in a cool shady place in the water. While I was dressing [cleaning] the ten bream, Mary Ann made a fire and got a pan of grease hot, ready for the cooking. Then while she cooked the fish I made a bucket of coffee. As soon as the fish were fried, the corn bread was split in half and placed in the frying pan on top of the brown meal from frying the fish and a little of the hot fat so that it was partially fried as well as warmed. Soon it was hot through and through with plenty of thick golden brown crust on all sides. Now all things were ready for the eating I had been longing for the past several days. The dinner was spread under a big white oak tree that was growing at the lower edge of the landing a few feet from the fire where a good bed of oak coals kept the fish, bread and coffee hot.

The eating lasted almost an hour. Mary Ann ate three of the fish while I picked the bones clean of an even seven and also ate three fourths of the big pone of corn bread. The black coffee was the best I had tasted since being taken down with the fever. After the dinner had been eaten, we took a short nap, probably an hour long. When I waked up I was thirsty for water. Immediately I grabbed a bucket and hurried off toward a fine spring flowing from under a high bluff. Here I filled-up on water and also brought Mary Ann a bucket full. After the visit to the spring I felt like a real man again. After resting a short time we packed up our tackle, pan and buckets, and started for home. Mary Ann carried the buckets and the fishing poles and lines while I carried the string of fish weighing about thirty pounds.

We went up the old log road. Pulling this steep hill with that string of fish was quite a task. I was so full till I had to stop and rest several times before getting to the top of the hill. Men, I'll be confounded if that trip and the dinner of fish didn't cure me completely of that spell of malaria fever. I was a well man the next day. It did make me feel better than a real gorge of quinine and pills. Yes sir, I recommend such a trip and dinner as a sure cure for malaria fever.

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Now I'll tell you my favorite fishing story. Its title is;

Maybe I'll Learn A Few New Fishing Words

Uncle Sam Johnson, Mary Ann's mother's brother took delight in telling this incident. Said he:

"One time during the early days of my ministry I was down on the Conecuh River in Alabama trying to fish a little when I came upon a bright little boy wielding a pole and line and using curse words smoking with fumes of sulfur and brimstone. I was horrified at his profanity and spoke to him in these words, 'My lad, don't you know if you swear like that the fish will never bite?' The bright faced little innocent lad looked at me with a kindly smile and said, 'Stranger, I know I still need to learn how to swear like you men do when you are fishing but I thought maybe I'd catch a few little one by using the few words I do know. Here, you take my fishing pole and show me what you can do. At least maybe I'll learn a few new fishing words.'"

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George's Fish Story

Along in the middle of the seventies, [1870's] all logging work shut down one year early in the spring. I pitched in and with the help of the Kate and the boys, Pete and Harvey, made a good crop. We cultivated about ten acres in corn, a small cane patch and a big garden. We also cleared about two acres of new ground for planting in sweet potatoes and a late pea patch. We'd worked hard all summer with the understanding that we'd take a day off and go fishing as soon as we got the crop laid-by. Kate and I were to go one day and Pete and Harvey to go another day so some one would be at home all the time to keep mischievous or fence jumping cattle out of the fields.

About the middle of July we were ready for the day off for fishing. It was agreed Kate and I would take the next Saturday for our fishing. Saturday, two poles and lines were rigged up for hand fishing and about a dozen catfish hooks rigged for setting out in the channel. Breakfast was eaten the next morning earlier than usual. Soon after sunrise we were in the wagon pulled by our old plow horse and rattling along down the log road toward the landing on Williams Lake. We carried feed for the horse and a cold snack for ourselves. After about three quarters of an hour we arrived at the landing. The old horse was taken loose from the wagon and hitched in a cool shade.

Kate and I took our fishing tackle and headed down the lake for a good cove or pool in which to cast a hook and try our luck at catching a fish. Fishing in the lake in those days was usually good because there was only a little fishing done and the waters had not been fished to death. The fish were not hungry that morning. After and hour or so we only had about half a dozen each. However, what we had were extra large ones.

I now laid my pole aside, got my old gun, shot two jaybirds for fish bait and set my catfish hooks. An even dozen hooks were set at strategic places along the lake a few hundred yards below the log landing. I then got my pole and went back to join Kate and see if her luck had changed. To my surprise she had caught more fish while I was setting my catfish hooks than both of us had caught during the whole hour. I fished a little while, caught two or three more bream and then checked my set hooks. My luck was better with the blue cat than with the bream. I had three nice catfish weighing about three pounds each. They were staked out in a cool place in the edge of the water. Then I went back to fishing with my pole. After an hour or so only two more bream were landed. I then went back to look after my set hooks and took half a dozen big catfish from them. The hooks were rebated and left in the channel. I now had nine catfish and the Kate had about twenty fine bream.

We went to the landing, fed the horse, got out snack and went to the nearby spring and ate lunch. After eating we rested for an hour or so. It was now about 2:00 o'clock in the afternoon. Kate went back to her fishing with the pole and line while I went to check my set hooks. Four fish were taken from the hooks and staked out with my other nine. I then joined Kate again but found she had landed only two since lunch. I fished about half and hour without landing a single fish. It was now decided to take up my set hooks and go home so we could get there in time to clean and cook the fish for summer. In taking up my set hooks I go two more nice fish making an even fifteen in all. Kate had caught about 25 or 30 fine bream.

We got home about 5:00 o'clock in the afternoon and went to cleaning the fish for supper. During the next two days we feasted on fried fish, baked fish and stewed fish. Men, I recommend such an outing for all working men. It's a helpful change from the daily grind of work.

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One day as I was crossing the river at the Johnson Ferry I saw two small boys fishing nearby from a boat. I called and asked, "How's fishing this morning? How many have you caught?" The answer came back: "When we catch this one and one more we'll have one a piece." I thought this was a clever reply, and took it as a hint not to enquire into a fisherman's luck.

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Dot's Fish Story

One spring during a lull in logging work, I found myself without work for six or eight weeks. At the time there was no work of any kind in our community except logging. There was nothing I could do except to wait for the logging work to start. While I was strolling around home with nothing to do except cultivate a garden and a small potato patch, Matilda kept begging me to take a day off from my idleness and go fishing with

her down to Mineral Springs. I promised to do this as soon as I could get a little strip of new ground, about an eighth of an acre, cleaned up beside my garden and get it planted in field peas. I fooled around with this a few days, but Matilda liked to fish and kept reminding me that I had promised her to go fishing as soon as the peas were planted.

After a few days the necessary preparations were made and off we went to Mineral Springs for a day's fishing and dinner down by the spring, a fish dinner cooked on the ground if you please.

At the spring a small row boat was obtained for our use. By noon we had caught a large string of fine river bream, the biggest and fattest fish I had ever seen, that is, we had them, but Matilda had caught almost all of them. About all I had done was to paddle the boat for her while she caught the fish.

We went to the springs and cleaned about half of the catch and cooked them for dinner. While Matilda cooked the fish I made a can of the best black coffee ever made on the river. When the fish were fried, Matilda placed a hoecake of corn bread in the frying pan on the meal that had browned and shattered off the fish. A little fat had been left in the pan so the hoecake was sort of fried as well as baked. This gave it a flavor like nothing else can do. When the hoecake was baked with a golden brown crust on both sides and well done in the middle, the feast was spread under a big tree. Now men, this was a dinner of the old type, the kind that makes a man forget all the trouble of the world. It even makes a fellow love his worst enemies. Well, I see you men know just what I mean. We ate for nearly an hour then rested another hour. We then filled up on the best water in the world.

We went back and fished about another hour. I caught three or four good sized bream while Matilda caught about a dozen. We then went back to the spring, packed up our tackle and cooking equipment, strung our fish and headed for home.

Men, there's no need to tell you this was about the best fishing trip I ever had. Matilda and I agreed we would take a day off about once a month for this sort of recreation, but within two or three weeks the logging work started up and I had to go back to work. And men you know how it is when you are on a job. You just can't take a day off.

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Two sporting fishermen had fished all day and caught nothing. Late in the afternoon they came upon a small poorly dressed boy, fishing with a gallberry sprout for a pole and a line made for him by his mother by twisting a few sewing threads together. The boy admired the store bought fishing tackle the men carried, their sporty suits and fine high top wading boots. The men admired the fine fish the boy had caught. One of the men noticing the boy admiring their fine outfits said to him by way of encouragement: "Never mind little lad, some day you'll grow up and be me like us." The boy quickly replied, "Thanks mister for your sympathy, but I'd rather remain a boy like I am and be able to catch a few fish."

It's said that the men went home and sent the lad a supply of store bought fishing tackle because of his outstanding reply.

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Pete's Fish Story

When brother Harvey was about ten years old and I was about 12, Pa let us have a Saturday off to go fishing. Of course we wanted to go down on the river by Grandpa Carnley's swamp field where we could see him and maybe eat dinner at the field spring with the men working for him. We carried our dinner with us, because we were not certain we would catch any fish and partly because we were not fond of cleaning and cooking fish. We were a little disappointed when we got to the field and found no one working there. It seemed the crop had been laid by.

Almost all of our spare time for a few days before our fishing trip was spent in getting our tackle ready. All of Friday afternoon was spent in digging each of us can full of bait and finding a good string upon which to string our fish we hoped to catch. About sunrise on Saturday morning we started for the river. It didn't take us long to get there and get our hooks in the water. Since we had no boat, we had to fish from the bank. We fished up the river for an hour and caught only half a dozen large bream each. We then fished down the river below the field for an hour or two. Here we had better luck, having landed about a dozen each. We were wet with sweat and muddy from head to foot from sliding down and climbing up the slick river banks. We were as hungry as we were tired and muddy. We went to the nearby spring and ate the dinner we had brought with us from home.

After dinner we fished in some swamp sloughs, sometimes called lakes. Here we had to wade in the water that was from ankle deep to knee deep to get to the fishing coves and pools. We also had to fight millions of mosquitoes and yellow flies of the biting variety. However, the fish in these places were ready for a late dinner and took the bait almost as fast as we could get it to them. The fish in the sloughs were smaller that those in the river. They were of the stump-knocker and no-bigger varieties. But it didn't matter much to us boys if they were small. To us a fish was a fish. A three or four inch long fish counted the same as if it had been several times as long. Within an hour and a half we came back to the spring with approximately 25 each.

We went to the spring for water and to wash the mud from ourselves and our clothes, so we wouldn't be ashamed to be seen on the way home. We were about the proudest boys ever in the country. We had caught more fish than Pa and Ma had caught the Saturday before. We were willing to admit we did not have as many pounds as they had, but that didn't matter to us. In the count, a fish was a fish, and this enabled us to show a greater number than they did.

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I once read of a fisherman who made a specialty of catching only large fish. He never used tackle upon which small or medium fish could be caught. His neighbors showed

some doubt about the size of the fish he caught by asking if he weighted them or guessed at the weight and if he measured them or guessed at their length. To remove any doubt he had a fine pair of scales made for use in weighting his fish. He also had a special yard stick made for use in measuring his fish. This worked fine for a few weeks until one night upon his return for his office he was met at the door by his wife who greeted her fishing husband proudly with these words:

“Oh John, our baby is just two months old today. Sister and I weighted him and measured his height. Just think how he is growing. He’s 39 inches tall and weighs 4 pounds.” John looked a little surprised and said; “Oh, surely he doesn’t weigh that much and I’m certain he’s not that tall.” His wife replied, “Oh yes, he must be, because we weighed him on your fish scales and measured him with the yard stick you use to measure your fish.” For obvious reasons John fainted.

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Peter’s Fish Story

Late in the spring of 1866 an old Negro by the name of Zack Fisher and I went to father’s old hammock field one day to hoe a few acres of late corn. Old Zack was as his name suggested a real fisherman. He knew all the signs of the moon and the weather as they related to fishing. Zack said, “The moon is just right for good fishing. The weather is now warm enough for the big ones to bite and the wind is blowing just enough and from the right direction to bring them near the surface.” He then suggested that instead of carrying dinner with us that we take a little meal, a little lard, some coffee, a frying pan and a couple of fishing lines. This was done.

The weather was hot and almost no breeze was stirring. We worked hard until about twelve o’clock. We were wet with sweat, tired and hungry. I was too tired to bother with fishing for my dinner. I was really uneasy lest we have nothing for dinner except a small tin can of black coffee and a hoecake of corn bread and suggested to old Zack that we proceed at once to bake the bread and boil the can of coffee. Old Zack again informed me that the signs are all just right for the fish to bite and if we didn’t have fish for dinner it would be because of our own laziness. He then told me to go over and start a fire of dry oak limbs near the big spring so we would have some good hot coals read for frying the fish. I suggested to him that we wait until the fish were caught. However, He insisted that the fire be started now while he was searching for some bait. His orders were obeyed and an ample supply of big dry oak limbs was placed on the fire. While I was doing this old Zack took his big hoe and tore up a rotten log and found a small can of big white grub worms. He also searched around in some grassy open spaces and caught a few big grass hoppers.

We then went down near the old dead river where we cut some long slender sprouts for fishing poles and tied our lines on them. Old Zack then gave me three big grasshoppers and a few worms and told me to fish a few minutes in a nearby cove while he fished fifty feet away just above an old dead tree top extending into the water. As old Zack started off

to his fishing place he said: “Try a big grasshopper first, right in the center of that cove. This is the time to use them. They are flying all over the woods and some of them are no doubt falling into the water. The big bream and yearling trout are probably waiting for them to hit the water and will strike immediately. If they don’t strike real quick you should try one of them big white worms. Pete, you should catch dinner right in that cove.

I picked a big grasshopper from the little can given to me by old Zack, fastened it on my hook and dropped it in the cove. It hadn’t more than hit the surface when it was struck by a big war mouth bream that fought frantically for a minute or so before being pulled from the water. This fish was removed from the hook and the same bait dropped back in the same spot. Immediately another fish about the same size was pulled out. This same stunt was repeated a third and a fourth time in rapid succession, giving me four large bream, about enough for any man’s dinner.

The fourth fish rather tore up the grasshopper making it necessary to put on new bait. This was done and the hook dropped about ten feet away from the center of the cove. When it struck the surface nothing took it. It was lowered in the water. When it was two or three feed deep something hit it with a terrific jerk and kept on pulling. After a minute or two a trout weighing about a pound and a half was landed. The same bait was dropped a few feet above where the trout was caught. Within a minute or so it was taken by another trout about the same size as the first one landed. As it was being removed from the hood old Zack walked up with six big bream and one trout.

We then took our fish to the spring where they were dressed [cleaned] and cooked for dinner. As soon as four of them were dressed old Zack put them in the hot pan to fry. Within a few minutes the 13 fish were cooked and ready for eating. While old Zack cooked the fish I had made a tin can full of good black coffee. As soon as the fish were out of the pan Zack placed a hoecake of corn bread in the pan leaving a little fat in the pan so the hoecake was given a little fish taste. I managed to eat five of my fish while old Zack cleaned up [ate] six. We rested a few minutes and then divided the thirteenth one. We now realized we were a little too full to hoe corn where some of the grass had to be pulled from beside the corn by hand, because we could not stoop over. Hence, we lay down on the leaves in a cool shade near the spring and rested for half an hour.

Before we went back to work, old Zack placed all of the big white worms he had taken from the old torn up rotten log in a can filled with damp rotten wood so they would be good for use later in the day. While he was doing this he remarked, “We should get all the corn hoed a little before night if we work hard and fast and could so some more fishing, maybe catch a good string full to carry home for supper. You know Peter; about sunset is the best time to catch fish if the weather stays good.”

By working steady and fast the job was finished a short while before sunset. Immediately after the last row was hoed we took our fishing tackle and can of bait and returned to our same fishing places. Within half an hour old Zack had caught twenty big bream and yearling trout. I had caught fifteen. They were strung up and we headed for home. We had a hard time trying to convince the folks at home that we hadn’t spent the entire day

fishing instead of hoeing. In fact, I don't think anyone was convinced until some one of the boys or father went to the field and found the corn had been hoed and all the grass cleaned out.

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The Wonder Was, How the Catfish Caught the Jaybird

Now men, I'm going to tell you a short true fish story as told to me a few years ago by good friend Bud Malone when he lived down on Big Coldwater Creek. He told of his afternoon experiences in fishing in the creek in short sentences, aided by gestures from both hands, nods of the head and earnest facial expressions substantially as follows:

"My daddy-in-law and I went fishing up on Big Coldwater Creek one Saturday evening. We fished a long time, caught nothing. We never even got a bite. Late in the evening I caught a big blue channel catfish on a small hook that was baited with a green lizard. I pulled him near the top and saw he was a big one. I let the old man hold the line. The water was only waist deep so I waded in and slipped up behind the fish and caught him by the tail with both hands. I flung him clean out on the bank. That fish weight eight pounds and made a good meal for all the family of ten. When we cut him open we found him full of persimmon seeds and jaybird feathers. Never could figure out how he caught the jaybird, reckon he caught him while up the tree eating persimmons."

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Bud's Fish Story

Men, I have never fished but little. The reason is I'm not lazy enough to enjoy sitting all day on an old damp log or wading half leg deep or deeper in mud and water while fighting mosquitoes and golden yellow flies to catch a few little stump-knockers or no-bigger. Another reason is I never have liked to be classed as a liar. Another reason is my imagination is not the kind to sit for hours watching a cork on a fishing line tremble in ripples caused by a gentle breeze and work my imagination into wishful thinking that a big ten pound bass is nibbling a the hook.

Men, I'm going to tell you about the last time I went fishing. I had sworn off five years before when Uncle Harvey Carnley and I fished all day and caught two little stump knockers and two little bullhead pollywogs. We went home tired, wet, muddy and almost starved to death. But that is not what I meant to tell you about. My last fishing trip was like this:

My dear brother who was living way up in Alabama came down to visit me and other kindred. You know he lives way up in Alabama where the cotton fields are as white as snow and where the river waters are thick and yellow with clay and no fish can live in those waters except bull headed pollywogs. Well, brother used to love to fish down here in our clear crystal waters where all the fish are clean and as bright as new money. He just had to go fishing down on the river around Mimms Island and the old log landing

where we used to work and try his hand at catching some big trout bred up in the clear waters of the Holley Mill Creek in our familiar boyhood haunts. He just got to talking about old times when we were boys you see, about we used to catch big bright fish around the mouth of the creek before they had been long enough in the river to color their shining silver sides. Then he talked about the big war-mouth bream and the big goggle-eye bream like the ones he used to catch on the leeward side of the island during the resting dinner hour when we rafted logs at the landing. Then he talked about the big sun bream that he used to catch along the nearby banks of the river and how good they tasted when fried crisp and brown. And then he talked about the brook trout he used to catch in the coves and pearly pools of the adjacent creeks. And finally, he got down to the unnumbered little stump knockers, and other no-name fish we used to catch out in the shallow swamp sloughs, sometimes called lakes. As Pete said, their size didn't mean anything. They were fish with a flavor that lingers. Then he mentioned the fun we had by taking big blue channel cat from set hooks anchored out in the channels on either side of the Island where the big one fed and chased each other in playful sport until caught by our hooks.

My, my, by this time I was constrained to go fishing with my dear brother from way up in Alabama and enjoy again the youthful sports and haunts of our boyhood days. I couldn't resist any longer even though I knew I would do it at the risk of being again classed with those who know not the truth. So I took the risk for the sake of again enjoying with my brother the haunts of our boyhood days. Now men you see where I am. You see where my weakness got me just for the sake of my dear brother from a way up in Alabama where the cotton fields are white as snow. That very afternoon we managed to borrow enough fishing tackle to give us a full day of sport down on the river among millions of mosquitoes and thousands of gorgeous golden winged yellow flies.

About sunrise the next morning we headed down the old familiar log road of our boyhood days carrying with us our fishing tacks, can of bait, a big tin dinner bucket filled with the same sort of rations, Yankee beans, bacon, corn bread and country cane syrup, that we used to carry to the old log landing when we went there to raft round logs and square timber. We also carried an old muzzle loading shotgun just in case we might want to shoot a jaybird or a woodpecker for catfish bait and also to give us a feeling of security if we should meet a big bobcat or a ten-foot alligator that might refuse to give us the right-of-way around an old friendly fishing cove or pool. As we walked along down the old log road we noticed many changes in the contour, the curves, the washed out gullies and big sand beds washed up at the foot of familiar hills. Yet with all these changes it was surely the same old friendly log road we had traveled twenty years before.

By the time the sun was half an hour high our baited hooks were dropped in the mouth of the Holly Mill Creek but the big trout of our boyhood days were not there. At first we thought perhaps they have overslept themselves and were not ready for an early breakfast so we tried in vane to coax them to come out and accept our offerings. Soon we found they had departed for places unknown to us without leaving their new address or even a dim trail to follow.

We shot a couple of sapsuckers to use as bait for our catfish hooks and set them in the middle of the channels on either side of the Island where the big blue catfish used to feed and chase each other in playful sport. When this was done we took our row boat and began fishing up the east bank or the river for big river bream. Our luck was not so good. My brother had three while I had only one. After fishing for half a mile we crossed over to the west bank and fished back to the island. On the west bank we had not better luck. Only two each had been pulled from the water.

Our set hooks were now examined to see if the big catfish had departed like the big trout had done. We took only one small blue channel cat and one little bull-headed pollywog from each channel. The blue cat was small but made good eating. The two bullhead pollywogs were not over six inches long, just a head and a tail each.

We now fished one side of the river for half a mile and back up the other side. Our luck got worse. Brother on the last lap of the trip landed one little bream about four inches long. I was like the boy who had told George earlier, if I had caught the one that got my bait and the one more I would have still had only two. We now examined our catfish hooks again. Out luck had departed like the big fish. Only one little bullhead pollywog was taken from each channel consisting of just two heads and two tails. We were so disgusted that we took up our hooks, rolled them up and was about to go home. Just then the mill whistle at Bluff Springs blew for dinner, and reminded us of our good old fashion dinner in the bucket.

We now took our dinner and went to the familiar spring where we really enjoyed an old time dinner. The kind we used to eat when we could really eat and enjoy it. Men, I recommend a dinner like that for any working man. Such a dinner might not cure a stubborn case of chills and fever, but it will cure a chronic case of constitutional inertia. Such a dinner will put marrow in a man's bones and muscles on them. It will put red blood in his veins and hustle in his makeup. It will put too much energy in his system to let him sit all day on a cold damp muddy log gazing at a floating fish cork, while his constructive imagination and thinking machinery rust and decay. Men, I whole heartedly recommend such dinners for all good fishermen.

When dinner was over we rested a short while then took our tackle and headed for the cozy coves and pearly pools in the adjacent creeks and sloughs, now content to catch even a few little creek bream, and stump knockers. Here we met myriads of mosquitoes and golden winged yellow flies who evidently hadn't had a square meal in a month. Their javelins punctured us unmercifully while we slapped, scratched, fought and fished for what ever would bite our hooks and prayed; "Lord, any kind of fish will do now." We were like Pete over there when he said: "A fish is a fish, if it isn't any bigger than my thumb nail." We caught but a few.

After an hour of this sort of fishing, fighting, slapping and scratching our fishing fever was cured. Our fishing fever, like the big fish, had departed never to return. But men the fever brought on by the poisonous punctures and the incessant scratching was rapidly rising, rising, rising. It was now simmering around 110 degrees with the boiling point

peeping at us from around the bend in the slough. Desperation was upon us. Something must be done and quickly. We held council of war and voted unanimously to retreat leaving the enemy in undisputed possession. Our catch since dinner was checked and found to contain 5 stump knockers, 4 small fish and 4 little fish with an average length of 3 inches. The entire catch was strung and placed on a pole ten feet long and three inches in diameter which was selected from an old crossway temporary bridge across the slough. The pole was then placed on our shoulders and we retreated toward the open country leaving the enemy in full possession.

When we arrived at the old log landing our morning's catch was taken from its mooring in the edge of the water and placed on the pole beside the afternoon's catch. Brother then picked up our fishing poles and dinner bucket while I picked up my old shotgun. The ten foot pole with its load of fish was then, with much difficultly, placed on our shoulders and we headed toward home. We had experienced one of the best and probably the most memorable day of our lives. Yes sir men, it was a most glorious day, one the memories of which can never be forgotten.
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Men, I'm like the sporting fisherman from the big city who had fished all day and caught nothing. On his way home he walked into a fish market and ordered the dealer to throw him a dozen of the biggest trout in the house. "Why throw them?" enquired the dealer. "So I can tell my friends and family I caught them. I may be a poor fisherman but I am not a liar."

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THE BETTS LAKE CYPRESS CAMP

When I was a boy eight years old, in 1886, I had my first experience in a cypress camp near Betts Lake Log and Timber landing down by the Escambia-Conecuh River. This camp was located a mile or so south of the Florida-Alabama state lie. This was about the time the cutting of the big yellow cypress trees in the Escambia-Conecuh River low flood plain was at the heyday of its commercial importance. Prior to the 1880's, the big trees had been used very little for commercial markets. They had been used occasionally by early settlers for making split boards and drawn shingles for roofs. No mills had been erected in the basin of t his river system especially for sawing cypress lumber of shingles. Hence, there was no great demand for cypress logs. There was no market for hewn cypress timber except for building railroad bridges, or trestles. Such timber, of course, was hewn from the smaller trees, from 18 to 20 inches in diameter. A few shingle yards for making drawn shingles commercially were operated on a small scale prior to the Civil War. A few were operated soon after the close of this war but for only a year or two. They were carried down the river on rafts of hewn timber to the Ferry Pass at the head of Escambia Bay. From here they were carried to Pensacola on small barges. This method of transportation was not satisfactory. Hence, the making of drawn shingles ceased to be an industry long before it really had any commercial value.

During the early 1880's, a mill was erected approximately two miles below the village of Bluff Springs on the west side of the Escambia River at a big whirlpool in the river. This mill as known as: "The Whirlpool Shingle Mill." The L & N Railroad Company built a switch to the mill. For a number of years this mill bought thousands of cypress logs coming down the Escambia-Conecuh River and cut them into shingles. During the early 1880's, the Emery H Skinner Mill was built on the west side of the Escambia Bay, approximately three miles from the Ferry Pass at the head of the bay. This mill bought many cypress logs for cutting into cypress lumber and for railroad trestles. Shortly after this, the demand for cypress logs increased rapidly.

Soon cypress camps, or log camps for cutting cypress, could be seen well scattered over the entire basin of the Escambia-Conecuh River. Such camps were temporary structures because they could be used only a few days during July and August while the men were deadening the trees. The trees were cut during the following winter during freshets in the river and floated from the low flood plains to the main river. Here the logs would be boomed in coves or in what were called "Dead Rivers" for rafting. From a dozen to twenty logs were fastened together in a clamp. Usually three or four clamps were coupled together for a raft. If the rafts were large, a stout oar-blade would be swung on each end. If the rafts were light, an oar-blade would be swung only on the head end.

The rafts would be floated down the river to whatever mill was offering the most attractive prices. This was call in river parlance, "running a raft." The time required to "run a raft" from near the Florida-Alabama state line was from three to five days, depending on the kind of raft and the stage of the water in the river. Of course, the time

required from River Falls, near Andalusia, was much longer. Logs coming from above the fall out of Conecuh River, or Patsaliga River were usually brought over the falls in small rafts or single clamps. Below the fall, they were made into larger rafts. This was true of all cypress logs brought out of Sepulga River and it big creek tributaries, Pigeon Creek, Persimmon Creek and West Sepulga.

The process of cutting cypress trees into logs was quite novel to those not familiar with it. Green cypress logs will not float. Hence, it was necessary to deaden the trees during July and August so they would float during the following winter. This was quite a task since so many of the big trees grew in swamp ponds and sloughs where they developed enlarged butts, too large to be floated from the swamps. This made it necessary to cut many of the larger trees as high as ten to fifteen feet above the bottom of the ponds or sloughs. This made it necessary to erect scaffolds for the men to stand on while deadening the trees and also while cutting them.

To avoid the expense of erecting a scaffold around each and every tree deadened or cut, the men soon learned to saw a notch two inches wide and ten or twelve inches deep in a large vein or three cornered edge growing on the big trees opposite extra big roots growing out of the tree at the ground. This could be done by two men each standing on a light pole ladder and using a crosscut saw. A two by twelve deal 8 to 10 feet long would be placed in a notch on opposite sides of the big trees. The deal would be made tight and solid by driving a well seasoned hardwood wedge in the notch on top of the deal. Often two men worked together in deadening the trees, one chopping right handed and one chopping left handed. Many of the men soon learned to chop both ways. Such a man would then chop half around a tree while standing on the same deal or board. In deadening the trees, notches were usually chopped from four to eight inches deep all around the tree. The same board or deal would be used in chopping the trees down.

Usually cypress trees were not cut into logs until a freshet was in the river high enough to float the logs from the low flood plain. If logs were cut and left in ponds, sloughs, or even in mud, they would sometimes absorb so much water until they would not float when high water came. The big trees would be chopped down with a chopping ax. Many times it was necessary to use extra long handles in axes used for this purpose. When the big trees were floating, the men would stand on the log and saw them into, permitting the lower end of the saw to extend into the water.

In order to float the logs to the main river, it was often necessary for an experienced man, in floating cypress logs from the swamp, to visit each tree deadened and select floating routes. Many small trees and cypress knees sometimes would have to be cut for the floating roads before high water came. This was my first job in the cypress camp. While father cut the larger trees and the big cypress knees from the float roads, I cut the bushes, vines, small trees and small cypress knees. They cypress knees were usually so soft and brittle until only a few licks were required before they could be knocked over with a gentle tap with an ax.

My next job around this cypress camp was taking a rowboat from one big fallen tree to another in moving the men from tree to tree during the time the men were sawing a tree into logs. After the logs were sawed and the men were poling them from the swamp, my job was to bring the boat along behind the men who were each carrying one or two logs. Sometimes three or four were carried, depending upon the width of the float roads cut and the current in the water. The men would paddle the boat back to the logs. [Father was sometimes criticized for permitting an eight year old boy to handle a boat alone in the deep flood waters. His only reply was “He’s a tireless swimmer and a good climber.” I understood what this meant and kept from swimming or climbing.]

Two or three afternoons during the week, I was left at the camp to bring firewood to the camp and a few jugs of water for use at night. This was usually done when there was no work in the swamp suitable for me to do.

The temporary camp house was the barns and sheds in a big hammock field owned and cultivated by Mr. Louis Jones who lived up on the hill a mile or so from the field. Our cooking place was on the ground 60 or 70 feet away from the hay barns and sheds where we slept. It required only an hour or two to bring firewood and water to the camp for the night. This gave me plenty of time to watch the small birds, large water birds, hawks, owls, and a few varmints feeding along the edge of the backwater. It was evident from the beginning they had all been pushed from their usual feeding grounds and hide-outs by the flood waters. The low bush birds were busy feeding on the ground. Yet, they were kept busy watching hawks, owls and such varmints as raccoons, possums and cats who were watching for a chance to catch a bird for supper.

Perhaps the names of the men making up the crew at this camp should have been given earlier. The reason this was not done, I was in the swamp a few days before the freshet came, assisting father in cutting float roads and doing a few other preliminaries before the flood waters and the hired men came.

The six men employed at the camp were:

Father’s oldest brother, George Diamond, known as George
His son Peter, known as Pete
T.J. Coker, know as Dot
James W. Nelson, known as Jim
W.N. Dykes, known as Willie
W.M. Morris, known as Bud
Father, known as Peter
Father’s boy, the camp flunky, known as little John

George and Bud were approximately 50 years old.
Jim, Willie, Dot and Peter were each about 40 years old.

Pete was 20 years old.
Little John, the camp flunky, was 8 years old.

Almost every afternoon, the owner of the field in which the camp was located, Mr. Louis Jones, and his father-in-law, Grandfather Tom Sundy, came down to the field to see how certain fences were riding out the flood and to look things over in general around the field and the flood waters. Grandfather Sundy was one of the patriarchs of this area. He was then 86 years old. This meant he was born here at the beginning of the century. [1800] He had been here when the Indians had their wigwams along the river and the clear creeks flowing into it. He was here when the woods were full of wild bears, roving wolves and cold blooded panthers. He wore a long white Aaron-like beard, adding to his dignified appearance. Seemingly, the two men enjoyed entertaining me around the camp and along the backwater. Grandfather Sundy told me some of his early experiences as a boy about my age. This was interesting to me. From this I began to ask him all sorts of questions about the early life here in this swamp and out in the hill country.

He told me about the early swamp fields cleared in the swamps and how they produced fine crops when the flood waters did not wash them away. Soon he began to tell me about the Milligan Swamp field or 75 acres a mile or so up the river. Immediately I butted in and told him I already knew about this swamp field, because I had dropped the seed there last year to plant 60 acres of this field in corn and four acres in rice. Father had cultivated this field the year before when the dropping of the corn and the sewing of the rice was a part of my job. Then I told him I knew something about the way raccoons, skunks, possums, bobcats, crows, woodpeckers, and other birds, destroyed crops grown in a swamp field. Almost all of the crop on all sides of the field except that bordering on the river had been harvested by birds and varmints before it was dry enough to be gathered and stored in cribs and barns.

The venerable gentleman also related to me many of his experiences up and down the Escambia-Conecuh River, running large rafts of big, long sticks of hewn pine timber and big round pine log rafts to the Ferry Pass. Here I told him one day in April when I was dropping corn near the river, a whistle was heard a short distance below the field. Immediately the plow hands left their plows and rushed to the river bank. One of them called me from the other end of some long rows to come and see the steam boat. I ran all the way to the river to see the show. Upon my arrival at the river, the boat was heard chugging along around a bend in the river a hundred yards below where the men and I were standing. It was about the greatest sight I had ever seen on a river, and it slowly came toward us. The boat was approximately 40 feet long and 18 or 20 feet wide. It was of the flat bottom type. It was propelled by a big paddle wheel approximately 8 feet wide and 8 feet in diameter. The wheel was held on two long timber beams securely fastened some distance back on the lower deck of the boat. The beams had big pulley and weights fastened to them for use in raising or lowering the wheel so as to keep the driving paddles at the right depth in the water to give the best driving force.

The river was not at its lowest, yet it was a little lower than usual except during long dry autumns. A man was sitting in an old white hickory rawhide bottom chair, measuring the depths of the water ever 15 or 20 feet with a long measuring rod. As the rod was pulled from the water above the surface, the man called the depths in feet to the man up on the second deck steering the boat. The boat was traveling not more than four miles per hour. This made it possible for the farm hands to get a splendid view of it as it came near our side of the river. All the farm crew was so excited over seeing the boat until none thought about getting the boat's name. This boat was the subject of much talk in the community during the next few weeks. So far as I ever knew, the boat did not come back.

I learned last summer when I was near the mouth of Patsaliga that a steam boat down the river during the summer and fall, stayed grounded on a sand bar or rock shoal all during the summer in that section during the late 1880's.

When I mentioned about seeing the boat to Grandfather Sundy, he immediately told me something about the early steam boating on this river. Among the things he told me, as few are mentioned that may be of interest to people now living along the Escambia-Conecuh River. He had learned from the Spanish speaking people living here when Florida became a part of the United States in 1821, that steam boating or boating of any kind was unknown up this river above the Florida-Alabama state line until after Florida became a part of the United States. Soon after 1821, a few "Push Boats" occasionally came from near the Montezuma Falls, taking a few bales of cotton, hides and furs to Pensacola. These boats would take back a supply of things needed but not easily purchasable near their homes. I understand the "Push Boats' were pushed by 3 or 4 men on either side of the boats pushing with long light cypress poles, already known among logging men as "Spike Poles" because each pole would have a stout iron band on its large end and a strong sharp spike in it protruding 8 or 10 inches beyond the wood. Grandfather Sundy said very few boats ever came above the Hayes Forbes Old Ferry Landing or the Betts Lake Log and Timber Landing, only a mile from our Cypress Camp in the Hammock Field.

Then he told me about the logging done here by The Molino Logging Company before the Civil War and the big brick store the company had up on the hill near the Steve Jones place where the company had a big camp. The company, he said, had a storage house down beside the river at the mouth of Betts Lake where the boats unloaded supplies for the big logging camps. He then told me where I could see some of the old bricks beside an old road beat out later along the Old Indian Trading Trail. The next time I traveled the old road, now known as the Winding River Road, I saw the old brickbats where the store once stood.

Then Grandfather Sundy told me this same Molino Milling Company built what was called "the first railroad" ever built and used in this community or county and, no doubt, the first one of its kind ever built in the entire basin of the Escambia-Conecuh River. It was called in log camp language, or parlance, "A Tramway Railroad." Pine poles from 6

to 8 inches in diameter were used for rails. The road was built from near the top of the hill a short distance from the head of White Water Branch, extending along down the branch on a gravity basis to the river at Rattlegut Cove. The road was powered by four yoke of oxen from Mr. Isaiah Cobb's cattle ranch. Incidentally, I may say that Mr. Isaiah Cobb was one among the first men to settle in this part of Florida after its purchase from Spain. He settled first up on a small branch near the state line. The branch was known for many years as "Cobb Branch". Later it was name "Fortner Branch" for Uncle Bob Fortner, who operated a ferry near Pollard for many years. When this Tram Road was built, Mr. Cobb had moved further out from the river on what was known as "Pine Level." Some years this same Mr. Cobb was elected High Sheriff of Santa Rosa County. I knew Mr. Cobb's three boys several years later, when they were rather old men. Their names were James, John and Frank. They verified the statement that their father sold the big range oxen that later powered this Tramway Road. Since the road was built on a gravity basis, the ox team could pull all the big logs that could be loaded on the bit car used for hauling the logs. The car was pulled close up beside the river and the logs rolled from the car into Rattlegut Cove. One afternoon while I was at the camp, a short while after I had brought firewood for two nights at the campfire and filled all the camp buckets and jugs with water, Grandfather Sundy came down to the field with his son-in-law. While Mr. Jones looking around his field fences, Grandfather Sundy took me half a mile up the edge of the backwater and showed me part of an old bridge used to carry the Tramway Railroad over a small hollow. The old right-of-way was plainly visible. All the old bridge timbers make of heart pine timber were still sound.

On the way back to the camp, Grandfather Sundy told me as we were walking down the Old Indian Trail beat out many years ago by Creek Indians, a long time before the Spaniards came to Florida, beaten out, he thought, by the Indians through many generations in coming to the Escambia Bay country in search of a little salt to help bay leaves, sassafras buds and roots make their venison and buffalo beef taste better. The Indians had no money to use as a means of exchange. They carried on a barter business. Little is definitely known just what articles were brought down this trail to barter for salt. However, it is known that flint arrow heads used here by the Indians were brought here and exchanged for salt. No doubt, pieces of flint were brought here for use in starting fires. Grandfather Sundy thought this trail was beaten out along the fringes of the river swamps and hammocks because almost all the Indians occupying this areas had their wigwams and tepees near the river in order to be near a supply of fish, turtles and fresh water clams.

When we got back to the camp, the sun was still high above the tall swamp trees. Mr. Jones was not at the camp waiting for Grandfather Sundy. While he waited for Mr. Jones to come, Grandfather Sundy told me about the Three Notch Road two miles out on the pine level country. He said he was out on the level near some Spanish settlements in the neighborhood of what many years later was called the Mount Carmel community, when a group of ten or twelve men with a big army wagon pulled by mules, came along down the trail-like road. The men stopped and engaged in conversation. It was soon learned the

men had been sent upon orders from General Jackson to open up a military road from the Old Federal Road leading across the central part of Alabama to the coast for military purposes. It seemed they had been told to follow an Indian trail known as “The Ridge Route Trail.” The object was to lay out a route over which military supplies could be moved to the coast quickly, regardless of rainy weather, boggy roads, or freshets in rivers or small creeks and branches. The leader of the group said the two Indians with them were friendly Creek Indians who, for a soldier’s wages, had agreed to pilot the men to the coast. He said they were following an Indian trail known as “The Ridge Route” to the Florida Town Trading Post. Grandfather Sundy said the man in charge told him they had followed the trail about 200 miles and had not crossed even a small branch or a damp hollow that might become boggy even in wet weather.
Grandfather Sundy walked down the road with the men two miles or more to the Holmes springhead where Elijah H. Holmes, the Spaniard, lived in a cabin, erected preparatory to taking up the Elijah H. Holmes Grant. During these two miles, notches marking the road were cut in three trees close beside the old trail. Grandfather Sundy said two men using chopping axes cut all the sap from two sides of the tree selected for the notches, leaving a square corner facing the trail or road. A third man then with a sharp smooth cutting broad ax, hewed the sides as smooth as any hewn timber ever carried to market, and cut three perfectly smooth notches about four inches apart and four inches deep. He said both sides of the square corner and the notches were made smooth to make it harder for fire to destroy the markings.

The next afternoon, Grandfather Sundy was down at the camp entertaining Little John, the camp flunky, by telling him all about the big wolf pens and wolf pits used here in Early Pioneer times to get rid of wolves that were destroying livestock on the range. He said Rix Gaylor, a Spaniard two miles down the river who decided to remain in Florida when Florida became a part of the United States, and Grandfather Neil Campbell, an early pioneer, two or three miles down the river, had learned to make wolf pens and dig wolf pits from an old Indian trapper up near the Tensaw River swamp on the Alabama River. Said they came home and tried the new way and found it worked well. Then he related how the early pioneers used the honey jug trick to get rid of the big black bears living in the nearby swamps, marshes and bay galls.

A small jug of new honey with a turkey quill stuck through the cork, with cork and quill driven well up in the jug, would be fastened in an advantageous spot and left on its side so the honey would drip through the quill. Bears would smell the honey a long distance and come to it. They would lie for hours licking the honey as it slowly dripped from the jug. Occasionally during the day, cattle owners would come in shooting distance where they could see the jug. If a bruin was caught licking the “Honey Jug” his uncontrollable taste for new honey was his undoing. The Pioneers had bear “steak and stew.”

During another visit by Grandfather Sundy to the hammock field and the Betts Lake Cypress camp came when Little John, the camp flunky, began to ask pioneer Grandfather Sundy what he knew about the Indians, Spaniards and Negroes. He related some

interesting things about them during the time they were slipping across the state line into Alabama and "running" cattle and slaves across the state line into Florida. He knew some of these events were what brought General Andrew Jackson into Florida, finally leading to the purchase of Florida from Spain. He said many stolen cattle were "run" across the line, and carried to Pensacola. Many others were kept well hidden out on the ranges in unsettled woods. Said the expression, "running cattle across the line" came into use because some times the cattle were almost run to death to get them across the state line before the drivers and the cattle were over-taken by a group of infuriated citizens who owned the cattle.

He said when these depredations began, the owners of stolen cattle and slaves stopped at the state line and returned home, because of the International law. However, as time moved along and nothing was done about these depredations by our government at Washington, the Alabama enraged citizens began to cross the state line and pursue the deprecators far into Florida. In many instances, many cattle and slaves were carried back across the state line. This led to bloodshed all along the border near where cattle and slaves were "run" across the state line. Then he related what he said was only a traditional story about a small group of men who were pursuing stolen cattle and slaves who were ambushed as they passed between what was later known as Mount Carmel springhead and the pond on the east side of the road from the springhead. The nude bodies of the men were found here. The men's clothing and the horses had been taken and, no doubt, carried far down the state. Such events, he thought, opened up the "Ridge Route Trail" into the "Three Notch Military Road."

The afternoon visit made to the camp by Grandfather Sundy entertained Little John, the camp flunky, when he might have been a little lonely around the camp all alone. They were more than entertaining. They created in the camp flunky an interest in pioneer life in the area that has continued through all the intervening years. The information picked from these cypress camp visits by one among the earliest pioneers in this area, except the Spaniards, caused the camp flunky to enter into conversations with other pioneers and pick up here and there information never recorded in history books and known by none of the younger generation.

Another interesting part of the Betts Lake Cypress Camp life was the after supper, yes, the after supper and not "after dinner" method the camp workers adopted, by common consent, the second night around the glowing campfires, for entertaining themselves an hour or two each night in camp parlance, before "hitting the hay" which in this camp was true, because the men slept on the hay stored in the barns and sheds.

The men were sitting around the fire on improvised seats with all hands talking and no one listening. When this was at its deafening stage one night, Pete, the 20 year old boy, who had been to school four or five three months terms in a small log cabin country school, suddenly called on the men to stop this method of entertaining themselves. When quiet was restored, he stated he would call on each man, beginning on his right, to relate

some interesting event during his life, like going to war, attending a break down dance, a hunting trip, going fishing, swapping horses, how he proposed to his wife, or how he gets along with his wife. This was agreed to without objection. It was also accepted without objection that any man disturbing another while relating any experiences in his life, would be ducked three times the next day I the deepest, swiftest water in the cypress swamp.

The first night Pete called upon each man, beginning at his right, to relate about a horse swap he had made. This was more fun than any circus that ever traveled over the country, or entertained a great throng under a big canvas tent.

The second night, each man told about a fishing trip he had made. Of course, this sounded much like a liar's convention competing for big cash prizes. By bedtime, every man was relaxed and ready to enjoy the sleep of a laboring man.

The third night, each man related his experience of a great hunting trip either in his home community or elsewhere if he had hunted in other localities. This was entertaining even if it did border a little on competitive contests between two high class clubs of HIGH CLASS LIARS.

The fourth night, each man related his experiences in contacts or near contacts with a ghost or a hant, whichever he called it.

This showed the frailties of the human mind and the endurance of human legs in running one's self almost to death to get away from ghosts or hants, UNSEEN, UNHEARD AND UNFELT.

The fifth night, each man was called upon to relate the most dangerous experiences he had ever had in working with cypress logs.

From these reports, it was plain that men are not necessarily brave but don't recognize danger when the see it. If also indicated men are a little careless with their lives at times or strangely adventurous.

The sixth night, each man was called upon to tell about the meanest prank he ever played upon anyone.

This was funnier than a circus tent full of clowns. It reached its climax when Uncle Bud skinned each man alive not for playing an innocent prank on a playful man but for committing a criminal act on an innocent man.

The seventh and last night, each man was called upon to relate how he gets along with his wife.

This was all fried chicken and hot biscuits, hot griddle cakes and new honey, cakes and pies, strawberries and cream, until Bud's turn came, when he acknowledged all his short comings. He then preached a sermon on plain, unadulterated lying and closed by requesting everybody to "hit the hay and pray" for LIARS in the Betts Lake Cypress Camp. When the guffawing and hilarious laughing was over, the men literally "hit the hay" without comment.

The experiences of the men as given the fifth night by the men at the Betts Lake Cypress Camp are given in full here to show a few of the real dangers to which they were subjected during the heyday of the cypress cutting and floating over the basin of the Escambia-Conecuh River. For more than a quarter of a century, this was a great industry in this river basin.

As the cypress logs were floated during flood waters from the flood plains of the rivers and large creeks in this area, they were boomed in eddy coves or in dead rivers formed by the numerous oxbow loop cutoffs. Here the logs were fastened together in clamps or blocks of from 12 to 25, depending upon their diameter. Three or four clamps were then fastened together making a raft. A stout oar-blade was then swung on each end of the large heavy rafts. If the rafts were small and light, an oar-blade was swung on the front only. The rafts were then "run" down the river to market.

The markets for many years were: The Whirlpool Cypress Mill, a short distance below the village of Bluff Springs. The Big Saw Mill at Pine Barren and the Saw Mill at Molino. Skinners Mill, approximately three miles below the Ferry Pass. It was on the Escambia County side of the bay. Wright's Mill on Escambia Bay also bought cypress logs for a few years. Later the son of Mr. Wright, who owned and operated the mill at Escambia Bay, operated a saw mill on a bayou at the lower borders of Pensacola.

Information was picked up at various locations over the Escambia-Conecuh River basin that quite a number of cypress logs were sawn into lumber at local saw mills scattered over the basin of the river. Some of the trees from which these logs were cut, no doubt, were deadened and the logs floated down large creeks or floating ditches. However, the larger portions of them were cut green and hauled to the mills by ox teams and big logging carts. Later such logs were hauled to mills by trucks. A few small young cypress logs are still being hauled to mills by regular logging trucks.

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A Typical West Florida Logging Camp

From the date of the earliest Spanish settlements along the Escambia River in the northwest corner of Santa Rosa County, Florida, small logging camps were familiar scenes of civilization until all the merchantable timber was cut and moved to the timber and lumber markets. The one as the center of activities related in this historic narrative was operated in 1868 by my father's oldest brother, Uncle William Diamond, under the name "River Road Camp".

When I was sixteen years old, 1894, Uncle William and father contracted to haul some cypress logs from the Escambia River low swamp on the west side of the river half a mile below the Mimms Island log landing and a few hundred yards below the Forbes old ferry location. The logs had been cut, preparatory to floating them from the swamp to the river during the winter freshets. No flood waters came during the winter. It had become necessary to get the logs to market before a small cypress beetle damaged the logs. A temporary camp was set up on the bank of the river. In the cypress hauling, there was much road cutting to be done in order to move the logs in the thick swamp with large teams of oxen. The job of cutting the roads and moving from place to place the snaking ropes and hooks used in pulling many of the logs from sloughs and cypress ponds was wished off on Uncle William's sixteen year old son, Wright, and me.

While living in this camp for a few weeks, Uncle William gave me a complete description of his early logging experiences just across the river from this camp on the Santa Rosa County side of the river. He also gave a minute description of the camp and its personnel, which he claimed was the best camp crew he had ever employed.

Three years later, Bud, who was one of the teamsters in Uncle William's camp across the river from the cypress camp, was employed as a teamster in a logging camp operated by father to drive one of his teams.

I was driving the other team, there being only two teams in the camp. Here for three months I hauled logs over the same roads with Bud. I stuck my toes under the same table under which Bud stuck his toes three times each day while eating his meals. I tumbled a camp improvised bed each night in the same camp in which Bud slept. Here for three months both day and night, Bud rehearsed to me all the ups and downs of his early experiences at River Road Camp in which he worked in 1868 for Uncle William. His rehearsals were learned "by heart" backward and forward.

In the several articles contained in this volume under Part One, entitled: "A Typical West Florida Pioneer Logging Camp", the facts and figures, events and occasions, incidents and accidents, have been related substantially as told to me by Uncle William and later rehearsed again and again night and day by Bud.

This camp was located approximately a mile and a half from the Mimms Island log landing on the Escambia River beside the famous Indian Trading Trail, parts of which

trail had already become part of the historic Winding River Road. Ten years later, the entire trail had become known as “The Winding River Road”, all sections of the old trail having been beaten out as a road by logging carts and big freight wagons pulled by logging teams.

The camp was a squatter’s old abandoned log cabin repaired and made temporarily habitable. It contained one room approximately 16 feet wide and 20 feet long. It had a door in either side made of rough edge lumber and swung on wooden hinges. It contained a large wide fireplace in the north end which was used for cooking the meals served at the camp. It contained one small window in the south end having a rough wooden sliding shutter.

At first the men slept on improvised beds spread down on the floor in the back end of the cabin. After Cook joined the crew he went to the nearby swamps and hammocks, cut a quantity of small white bay and black gum poles and built a neat bunk around the back walls for each man. The camp had a rough table upon which meals were served. Cook soon found rough boards from which he fashioned some table benches. Groceries were kept in boxes and barrels in one corner of the cabin not far from the fireplace. In this same corner Cook had made some shelves for his convenience. A few blocks and the table benches supplied the camp seats. A roughly built shelf to the right of the back door held the water buckets.

When the campers first moved in, a bunch of piney-woods rooters [Hogs] were sleeping under the cabin. On cold nights these shoats fussed a lot about cover. Their frequent squeals sometimes kept the men awake when they should have been sleeping.

Soon after Cook came to the camp as caretaker and cook with the help of Pap and Dave, some old split rails were removed from a nearby dilapidated fence and a fence built around the cabin to keep the hogs from sleeping under it and keeping the men awake at night. And too, Cook claimed this would prevent the camp from becoming infested with hog lice and fleas.

The oxen were kept in a lot made of old split rails 200 feet from the camp cabin. Beside the lot a little old time log stable had been repaired and was used as a place for the storage of feed for oxen. The spring for supplying water for domestic use at the camp was approximately 250 yards away down under a small bluff.

This camp was also located approximately a mile and a half from the Gaylor Dead River log landing. Logs nearer to the Mimms Island landing were hauled to it and logs nearer the Dead River landing were hauled to it. However, they were first landed at what was later known as “Jump Off Landing”, from which they were rolled over a 200 foot bluff and later rehauled 250 yards to the Dead River landing. This “Jump Off Landing” was used for all logs hauled from south of the landing to prevent going a mile and half around the head of a deep gully to reach a long hollow down which a road led directly to the Dead River landing.

Feed and groceries were hauled from the Junction, later known as Flomaton, by way of the Forbes Ferry, which ferry was located a few hundred yards below the Mimms Island landing. During freshets in the river, often occurring during the winter and spring seasons, feed and groceries were hauled from the junction to the nearest backwater from the river and brought to Mimms Island in strong row boats. The log carts took the feed and groceries from here to the camp.

All logs hauled were fastened together in large clamps by means of strong pole binders by using stout two inch oak pins driven through 2 inch auger holes bored through the binders into similar holes bored deep into the logs. Then from three to five clamps were coupled together forming what was known as a raft. A large oar, known as an "Oar Blade" was swung at each end of the raft for use in keeping the raft from luffing [bumping] against the shore or snags upon which it might "hang up". These "Oar blades" were hung in a long pole-like lever and balanced as the end of the lever on the raft was a tiny bit heavier than the "Oar blade" and so that when the blade was not in use, the lever held it swinging clear of the water and a few feet above any drift wood.

These rafts were floated to the Ferry Pass Landing. Usually one man occupied each raft on the trip. This work was known as "Running a raft." The time for the trip required from three to four days, depending upon the stage of the water in the river. At Ferry Pass the logs were inspected by licensed timber or log inspectors who supplied the owner with a certificate of inspection and specifications for his use in selling the logs on the Pensacola market. Sometimes square timber and round log merchants had buyers stationed at Ferry Pass with an ample supply of cash for use in buying timber and round logs there at the Pensacola market place. This was a great convenience for the owners of such timber and logs that did not care to make the trip to Pensacola.

The large three yoke teams were kept at the camp. The carts used were known as seven feet carts which meant the wheels were seven feet in diameter. The tires were five inches wide. The cart tongues were usually long enough to haul logs as long as 50 feet. The carts were rigged with cast iron hoisting rollers, such rollers not many years before having replaced the Drake tail hoisting way. Each cart had two log chains for carrying logs. One log was hoisted almost up to the axle tree and "Hooked off" on a strong hook swinging just beneath the axle of the cart. Then the second leg was hoisted and the chain left on the cast iron roller. At this time only large logs were hauled. Two of them usually were about as many as could be placed between the cart wheels. Later, when small logs were used, many carts were rigged with one or two extra chains and hooks for "Hooking off" the extra logs. Each cart could then carry as a load from three to six logs instead of two. Still later, when the timber became scarcer, veritable poles were hauled as logs. Such logs were snaked together in piles with the use of a snaking chain and one yoke of oxen. Such logs were then hoisted under the carts in large bundles.

The personnel of the camp consisted of five men, two teamsters, two log choppers [crosscut saws were not then in common use for sawing logs], who assisted Uncle William in rafting and running the logs to the Ferry Pass market, and a cook who also served as camp caretaker and general roust-a-bout.

The teamsters were known at the camp as Bud and Sarge. Bud had a wife and one small child. He lived in a cabin a few miles from the camp. Bud was a typical log hauler who never did any other sort of work. He was a short, heavy built man weighing approximately 160 pounds. He seldom took part in camp conversation and never entered into arguments with anyone. He was fond of relating his personal experiences in log hauling, but not as a braggart.

Sarge was a little over six feet tall and weighted approximately 175 pounds. As indicated by his camp name, he had served his company in the Confederate army as Top Sergeant. He was proud of his nickname "Sarge" as evidenced by his military style of walking and by the fact that his every conversation began and ended in some way connected with his duties as Sergeant in the army. For a while he had been quartered with officers of lower rank, sleeping in officers' tents and eating at officers' tables. As a buck private he had slept in his under clothing or in his regular army clothing. However, at the officers' quarters he acquired the dignified habit of sleeping in long, well laundered, white night shirts. To Sarge, this was a distinction of honor. He kept up this habit even in a logging camp, claiming he just couldn't sleep without the comforts of a clean night shirt. Sarge had no family but lived with his people at Canoe, ten miles west from the Junction near the home of Uncle William's father-in-law.

Dave and Pap were the log choppers who assisted Uncle William in rafting and running the logs to market. Dave had been a farmer boy in the cotton growing section of Alabama. He had made the trip to Florida just at the close of the Civil War when times were hard in Alabama. He had made the trip to Florida with some of the Gabriel Capers Family, who was constantly on the move up and down the Conecuh and Escambia Rivers from the mouth of the Sepulga and Patsaliga Creeks to way down on the Escambia River in the Coon Hill community. Dave soon found work chopping logs in the Coon Hill community and became an expert in the use of his ax. He was tall and slender and a good agreeable worker. He had a wife and a four year old son who lived temporarily with some members of the Capers family 4 or 5 miles down the river.

Pap, as he was affectionately known by all who knew him, was the real life of the camp. He, too, had lived up on the Conecuh River in Alabama and had been a logging worker for many years, either chopping logs or doing river work. He had spent much time in running rafts down the river. He had chopped square timber for the hewers in the areas on Sepulga, Patsalaggy, Conecuh and Escambia River.

Pap was now approximately 55 years old. His wife had died three years before. His grown son had strayed off following logging work. Pap had given up housekeeping and had sought work down in Florida among some friends he had met on his numerous trips in running rafts down the river.

Pap was always jolly. He displayed a fine sense of humor, even on serious occasions. Through his years of hard work in the logging camps and on the river, he had developed a unique philosophy of life well worthy of emulation. He had very little book learning. He could read and write a little but that was as far as he had gotten. However, he had been a

close observer since early childhood. He had been a student of human behavior. He had been trying all his life to learn why people act as they do. He knew people and could read them like a smart school boy can read a new simple story book.

Almost all his Sundays were spent around the camp with Cook. Occasionally he and Cook would go fishing when the water in the river was right and the fish were hungry. Occasionally they would go turkey hunting way fore day Sunday morning and feast on turkey the rest of the day and Monday. Pap admitted his weakness was his hot coffee drinking habit. He often drank it boiling hot direct from his can.

Before cook built the fence around the camp cabin the range hogs around the camp often slept under the floor. Occasionally the noise made by the hogs became disturbing to the men. The hogs would then be chased from under the camp into the nearby woods. In doing this, sometimes Pap would take a can of boiling hot coffee with him. He would fill his mouth with the hot coffee and squirt it between his lips fifteen feet on the hogs. The hogs would squeal piteously, turn sideways and scamper off sideling toward the nearby woods. Within a few days, hogs would be seen walking around the camp with hairless streaks crisscrossed all over their bodies. They resembled a crude map of a mountain country with all the rivers, lakes and mountain ranges drawn in exaggeration.

Pap and Cook had gotten together a few Detective Stories, some books on Indian Fighting and Wild Life in America. They had read and reread these until they knew them by heart. This was the way many Sundays at camp were spent. If an itinerant missionary preached within 5 or 6 miles of the camp, Pap and Cook would attend. They were good listeners and contributors for the support of the missionaries. They had become familiar with missionary work in Alabama before coming to Florida.

The man who served the camp as caretaker and cook was known as Cook. It he had any other name, no one at camp except Pap ever knew it. He, too, had originally hailed from Alabama in a cotton growing section by coming down the river on a raft of hewn timber with a friend who was a regular river hand. He had come solely to see the sights of the river. He went on to Pensacola with his friend to see the big boats and the town. While in the office of a timber merchant in Pensacola, he was approached by the owner of a firm operating large logging camps on the Perdido River who had somehow learned the awkward looking 20 year old boy could read and write and had learned to cook while working with a log camp driving crew on the Big Escambia Creek, a tributary of the Escambia River in Alabama. The man offered the boy a dollar a day and board as a cook and timekeeper in a camp up on the Perdido River. The boy who had never made over 50 cents a day and board himself accepted the offer and rode on a big freight wagon the next day to the camp up on the Perdido.

Cook soon learned his ability to write was probably what got him the offer. He found the foreman of the camp could not write at all. He had found it hard to find an employee in the camp who could write enough to keep the time the men worked during the month so the foreman could turn in a correct time sheet for pay envelopes.

Cook had worked at camps on the Perdido for nearly two years without returning to Alabama when a long dry spell caused a temporary shut down because logs could not be moved down the river. The camp took an indefinite recess until the next winter when it was expected heavy rains would bring the river back to its normal flow of water. Cook started home by way of Pensacola. He decided to visit the bay and see the big ships and the stevedores loading them with big sticks of timber. While here watching the loading of the ships, he met his friend Pap whom he had not seen since Pap had gone to work in Florida. Pap had run a raft of logs to ferry pass for Uncle William and had accompanied him to Pensacola. Pap recommended Cook to Uncle William for employment as a cook and camp caretaker. Cook accepted the job and accompanied Pap back to the camp and took over within a few days as camp cook and caretaker.

Cook was a good cook and handy man around the camp for a week. He then became lonesome and restless. Pap, who had noticed this, soon learned that Cook was worrying about his pair of good camp hunting dogs he left with a friend down on the Perdido River to take care of them for him. He also wanted his shotgun that he left at the same camp where he had left the dogs. Cook's worries had probably been caused by the fact he had gone down in a swamp to cut some poles for making some bunks and had walked up on some deer one afternoon and the next afternoon he scared up a flock of wild turkeys. Pap solved Cook's worries by agreeing to do the camp cooking Saturday and Sunday while Cook went back down on the Perdido for his clothes and incidentally would bring his gun and dogs along too.

Saturday morning long before daylight, Cook was on his way. Sunday night, about bedtime at camp, Cook returned with a few clothes, his gun and dogs. He was none the worse for wear because of having walked approximately 100 miles in two days.

The first of September, Cook began keeping what he called "His Camp Accounts." The accounts consisted of a page in his little camp account book for keeping the time each man worked, and the record of all items charged to him each month. A page was kept for the record of the logs hauled each day, and for the number chopped each day. This was simple and required little time. The hour set aside for this was immediately after supper each night. At this hour Cook would get his book and pencil and inquire of each man if he had worked a full day, the number of logs hauled or the number chopped as the case might be.

The first of October, Cook began keeping, in addition to his records of time worked, logs chopped and logs hauled, what he called his "Daily Diary." In this, he kept a record of daily happenings at the camp. Each night, after his entries of time and logs chopped and logs hauled were made, Cook turned over in his record book to his "Daily Diary" and called for any interesting or unusual events happening during the day that should be recorded. As the men reported events and incidents of the day, Cook made notes of them under the heading, "Daily Diary" happenings that the men thought worth recording. A copy of this "Daily Diary" for the month of October 1868 is given here as a sample of what was usually recorded under this heading.

DAILY DIARY FOR THE RIVER ROAD CAMP
FOR OCTORER 1868

Monday - October 1
Cook reported the camp had purchased a two bushel sack of fine sweet potatoes from a range cattle owner a few miles down river from the camp. Immediately upon hearing this report, the crew began discussing “Ways and Means” to catch two of the ‘possums to be roasted with potatoes simmering around them.

Cook was ordered to search the surrounding range immediately or sooner for ‘possum signs, tracks and persimmon seeds, hideouts such as caves, clay-roots and hollow trees, and arrange for a ‘possum hunt.

Tuesday – October 2

Had plenty of baked sweet potatoes for supper. This made the ‘possum fever run a little higher than before. Fear was expressed by Sarge and Bud the sack of taters would be eaten before they tasted ‘possum. Cook promised a ‘possum hunt soon.

Bud and Sarge made arrangements with Dave for him to get from Uncle Harvey Carnley half a hide he had recently saved from a three year old red yearling he had recently dressed for beef. They wanted it for making new driving whips they could pop “way fore day in the mornings.” Said they wanted it ‘cause red hides made better whips than hides of any other color.

Dave wanted to know what the h--- read hair had to do with making a whip. The teamsters explained the red hair made whips “more pliant and much tougher.”

Wednesday – October 3

Bud and Sarge reported having seen an old raccoon and four young ones nearly grown cross the log road ahead of the teams and rack off over the Devil’s Backbone. Cook promised to investigate this as soon as he could spare an hour or so from camp.

Thursday – October 4

Teamsters reported having seen a big bear come from Mystic Marsh and head over the Devil’s Backbone. Cook agreed to investigate this when he had some buck shot and a brave partner like Pap.

Friday – October 5

Brave Man made his first visit to the camp, arriving a few minutes before supper. He ate a peck of solid rations plus some cold leftovers from dinner.

Brave Man was about 40 years old, weight about 175 pounds. He was a squatter on no-man's land a few miles down the river. He wore Number 11 brogan shoes. Employed chopping timber up near the Alabama-Florida line and was en route home for the weekend.

Saturday – October 6

Cook saw several deer near camp while he was cutting poles for camp bunks. Teamsters reported seeing a flock of turkeys fly to roosting places near the head of Devil's Backbone. Cook and Pap took turkey fever from hearing the report.

Sunday – October 7

Cook and Pap were at camp alone. Pap had seen trout jumping around Mimms Island and up in the mouth of what was later known as Holly Mill Creek. They went fishing before breakfast and were back at camp before 8:00 A.M. with a big string of fine trout. We feasted Sunday and Monday on fried fish and baked trout.

Brave Man came by the camp for supper. He cleaned up all cooked fish plus an oven of biscuits and a bottle of syrup. Bud brought to camp a little 3 or 4 months old gray and white kitten to aid in keeping rats and mice away.

Monday – October 8

Dave and Pap each took a raft of logs to the Ferry Pass Landing for Boaz Williams, who also took a raft.

Cook investigated the edge of Mystic Marsh for turkey scratching and raccoon tracks. He found both and a big persimmon tree where 'possums had been visiting for luscious ripe fruit. It was requested by the camp crew to prepare for a 'possum hunt around the persimmon tree.

Tuesday – October 9

Cook investigated hideouts and feeding grounds for raccoons. He found the place a raccoon's paradise. Plans were made for a 'coon hunt.

Teamsters saw turkey tracks in the log road and a dozen deer in the woods near the log road. Venison fever soon ran high.

Wednesday – October 10

Dave and Pap retuned from running rafts of logs. They crossed the bay of marsh at Old Woodbine and walked up the old Indian Trading Trail winding along the fringes of the river swamps and hammocks. Almost the entire trail from Florida town to the Florida-Alabama state line had now been beaten out into a dim road used for hauling freight.

Thursday – October 11

Teamsters reported seeing a flock of turkeys fly from the Jump-off Landing over the river swamp as if expecting to roost in the tops of tall swamp trees for the night.

Heavy rains fell during the afternoon and made the logging roads boggy. It washed up some of the logging roads. It was necessary for Boss Williams, Pap and Dave to spend half a day repairing roads.

Friday – October 12

Pap and Dave cut two loads of binders for use in rafting logs. Teamsters hauled them to Mimms Island Landing.

En route to camp they scared up a flock of turkeys. They saw where they lighted in some tall pines and red oaks near the camp. We planned a turkey hunt there early Saturday morning.

Saturday – October 13

Way fore day, early in the morning, Pap and Cook went turkey hunting while Dave cooked breakfast. They were back to camp about sunrise with a big gobbler and a small hen.

Cook roasted the hen for Saturday dinner.

Brave Man came by late Saturday afternoon, a day late. He ate his usual peck of solid rations plus all the cold turkey scraps left from dinner. Found nobody at camp but Cook and Pap. They treated him a little cold, but he failed to take the hint.

Sunday – October 14

Pap and Cook went turkey hunting to a roost they had located late Saturday afternoon and brought home only one old tough hen. Cooked her Sunday when time was plentiful.

Brave Man came by for supper Sunday night as usual. He picked clean all the old tough turkey bones. He was told of the attacks made during the week by panthers below the camp and bears above the camp. Pap cautioned him to be on the watch for such attacks.

Monday – October 15

This was a rainy day in camp. However, because of Pap's jovial spirit, it was not even a blue Monday or a rainy day of long faces. On the other hand, it turned out to be about the happiest day ever spent in a log camp anywhere. Pap taught the members of the camp crew the best lesson in Florida Frontier frugality in the use of time they ever had. The lesson stuck.

Tuesday – October 16

Pap and Dave cut stringers and poles for a causeway. After supper the crew went a "Possum Hunting up a Simmon Tree."

Had an exciting chase with a bobcat found eating 'simmons with the 'possums.

Wednesday – October 17

Pap and Dave helped Boss Williams build a causeway. Sarge killed a six foot diamond back rattler.

The crew had baked 'possum and 'taters for dinner and supper.

Thursday – October 18

Another heavy rain. Washed up some parts of the log roads. Mud holes in roads were made soft. Heavy logs made the mud holes or cart ruts deeper and muddier.

Teamsters reported seeing two panthers cross the road ahead of the teams between the camp and the Devil's Backbone.

Friday – October 19

Rain came late in the afternoon.

A few minutes before supper Brave Man strolled up in fine spirits, strutting as proud as a peacock. Talked freely. His boss had paid off. He had money in his pockets, enough to make a fellow strut. At supper teamsters reported seeing a big bear near the swamp a mile or so from camp. This started a discussion of bears and panthers.

Soon Pat changed the conversation to the cold bloodedness of attacks by panthers. Brave Man left the camp a little upset. Dave thought it was because of the usual peck of solid rations plus an oven of biscuits and a pitcher of Louisiana molasses. Pap thought it was because of the conversation about the cold bloodedness of panther attacks, and said, "He'll run tonight from every leaf that shakes over his head."

P.S. This was the night Brave Man had what he called: "His accident."

Saturday – October 20

Sarge killed two quail with his long driving whip and brought them to camp. They were dressed, broiled and eaten by Pap and Cook for supper.

Sunday – October 21

Pap and Cook at camp alone. We walked six miles to hear a missionary at a mission station. Each put five dollars in the collection plate.

Monday – October 22

Cook reported having seen some bear tracks near the Jump Off landing this afternoon while scouting for turkeys.

Cook reported having killed a three spike buck late in the afternoon while waiting for turkeys to come near and fly to a roosting place. Said the deer trotted from the swamp and stopped in front of him not more than fifty feet away. Said it stood and begged to be shot in the neck.

Tuesday – October 23

Cook reported all signs just right for a raccoon hunt over on the north side of the Devil's Backbone along the edges of the creek, among some shallow ponds and along some sloughs. He also informed the crew that he had made all the necessary arrangements for the hunting party to arrive at the "Raccoon Range" about an hour after dark, thus giving the coons plenty of time to get well away from the old boggy Mystic Marsh and scattered out over the best feeding grounds ever known.

About half an hour after dark the crew left camp to take part in what became known as "A Roaring Rollicking Raccoon Round Up."

Wednesday – October 24

Pap and Dave assisted Boss Williams in rafting. Two rafts were completed before night. While the men were gathering up rafting tools for leaving camp, they saw what seemed to be two half grown bears swim the river a short distance above the landing and head out up the creek.

Thursday – October 25

Boss Williams, Pap and Dave completed the third raft and hung three oar blades ready for leaving a little before noon for the Ferry Pass in order to make the trip while the river was at the right stage to make the run in two and a half days and return home Saturday afternoon.

Friday – October 26

Teamsters hauled logs from Jump Off landing to the Gaylor Dead river landing. Found the big sand bed near the Jump Off covered with turkey tracks. Plenty of big bobcat tracks over the sand bed indicating the cats had been stalking the turkeys hoping to get

near them in a thick, swampy place where a sudden swift run would make it possible to catch a turkey before it could rise upon its wings among the thick low underbrush.
Saturday – October 27

Late in the afternoon Pap arrived at camp, Boss Williams and Dave having stopped at their homes a few miles south of the camp.

Bud and Sarge had left camp a few minutes before Pap arrived. After hearing Pap's report of the fastest run he had ever made down the river with a big log raft, Pap was informed that Cook's dogs, Rough and Ready, had just chased a flock of turkeys from the back of the ox lot and caused them to take wing a short distance down the hill and fly over into the timber at the edge of Malone Hammock field where it would be easy for them to get at least one apiece about the crack of the day in the morning.

Pap and Cook then made their guns ready for the early morning turkey kill.

Sunday – October 28

Pap and Cook at camp alone today.

About an hour before day they took their guns and each leading one of Cook's dogs on a leash, slipped down near where the flock of turkeys took the wing late Saturday afternoon. Cook knew every square yard of the area and knew about where the turkeys would come to the ground near daylight.

After locating Pap in a good shooting hideout, Cook stalked on down toward the creek lest a part of the big flock come to ground south of the timber area and feed out up the creek. Here he found a good shooting hideout.

Within half an hour Cook heard Pap's gun shoot. Within three minutes, Cook heard several turkeys take to the wing. He stood up to get a better view in the morning darkness. The swish of wings was coming nearer and nearer. Presently one lighted near enough for a shot, and tumbled over at the discharge of Cook's gun.

Soon the others of the flock flew off toward the swamp. The men were back at camp before sunrise and had fried turkey for breakfast.

Monday – October 29

Teams hauled logs from Jump Off landing to the river. Saw where bears had been rubbing their noses against the end of freshly chopped logs getting them well covered with turpentine as if preparing to rob a honey bee tree nearby somewhere. Reported this to Cook at noon when he came to the landing immediately after dinner. After searching for over an hour, he located a big red hearted pine blown over in the edge of Wilson Branch. The bears had torn open only a foot or two of the tree at its rottenest part. Cook

soon cut the tree open further down where the hollow was smaller where he obtained a dishpan and a water bucket full of the newest and best honey ever lifted from a fallen log.

Tuesday – October 30

When Bud and Sarge dropped their cart tongues a few yards below the lot a little before sunset, they saw a large gray fox jump from a wild bullas grape vine and scamper off toward the east. This was told to Cook, Pap and Dave at the camp. Immediately the three of them brought Ruff and Ready to the bullas vine and put the dogs on the trail.

The dogs took off eastward and were soon out of hearing. The men all stood around the feed lot listening for the dogs to come back until the oxen had eaten the grain and hay that have been given them.

As the men started toward the camp preparatory for supper, the dogs were heard coming down the river near the Gaylor Dead River Landing.

Immediately a gun, ax, leashes and torch material were picked up and away the crew stamped to meet the dogs. A pioneer fox chase was on lasting half the night with no thought of supper.

After the chase was over, Pap requested Cook to enter the chase as: “The Speediest and stampedingest unpremeditated fox chase ever been or to be along the area of the River Road Camp,” was had tonight for over six hours.

Wednesday – October 31 – Halloween Time

A considerable amount of rain fell late during the afternoon, causing the weather to become real cool as if winter was near at hand.

The ox were kept in the lot for the night and given hay instead of letting them out to graze because of the disagreeable task of driving them to the lot before daylight when the woods were so wet.

Because the oxen were kept in the lot and given hay, all the hogs around the feed lot were driven from the lot and the gate fastened to prevent the piney woods rooters from ruining the hay before the oxen could eat it.

At late bedtime, a shoat was heard squealing around back of the lot. This shoat squealing event incidentally just naturally turned itself into the most appropriate Halloween celebration ever known up and down the area of the Escambia-Conecuh River.

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LOGGING IN EARLY FRONTIER FLORIDA

By

John Thomas Diamond

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Fight Him Fair

One rainy Sunday afternoon when Bud and Sarge arrived at the camp to feed their teams, one or two oxen from each team were not in the lot. After waiting a few minutes for these oxen to come to the lot they decided to walk down into some nearby woods to look for the missing oxen and drive them to the lot. Sarge went off up the creek and Bud went down toward the Malone old hammock field.

Approximately a quarter of a mile from the camp in the direction Bud went was a rather thick wooded area containing many young pine trees tall and slender and many clusters of gallberry bushes and clumps of taller hardwood bushes from eight to twenty feet high. In this wooded area were several dry ridges covered in places with a thick blanket of pine straw providing splendid places for oxen to lie during the night. As Bud was circling back toward camp he passed near a tall young pine that had blown over, its roots still holding in the ground with its truck reaching about thirty feet from its roots, having fallen on a saw log stump two or three feet high, and its top extending forward fifty of sixty feet and suspended from six to eight feet above the ground. As Bud approached this slanting slender pine near its center, suddenly he heard a sharp, piercing, hair-raising yowl coming from this slanting tree. On glancing toward the direction from which the awful sound was coming, he saw not more than twenty feet in front of him a large bobcat standing on the slanting tree with his back arched and his hair all turned the wrong way as if ready to lick the world. The quicker I get away from here the better thought Bud as he backed away.

As the big cat bared his teeth he let out a second yowl even worse than the first one. Immediately, Bud turned and ran directly away from the cat for a short distance and then circled back toward the camp. He continued his speed until entirely out of the thick wooded area. Here he stopped for a breathing spell. He then hurried on the camp where he found Sarge had just arrived with the missed oxen. Before feeding the oxen Bud related his experience in walking too near the big bobcat, the frightening yowls and his race in getting to the open woods.

Sarge laughed at him for getting so badly frightened and running so far from a little insignificant thing like a bobcat. “Why,” said he, “the thing wouldn’t weigh more than 8 or 10 pounds at best. You should have taken it by a hind leg and popped its head off like a country boy pops a black snake’s head off or cracked its brains over a stump or tree or whatever other object was handy.” Bud replied, “That’s good advice when you’re a quarter of a mile away from the big cat and are in no danger. It would be far different it you were staring him in the face, looking at his sharp teeth, arched back, mean look, and hearing his threats.”

Sarge continued to tease Bud about getting so frightened at a little cat, in all probability it was nothing but a little stray house kitten lost off down there in the woods and was mewing for something to eat. “Why,” he said, “if the little kitten had been a large man eating panther on that slanting pine you might have been justified in getting frightened

and running off like a little cowardly rabbit would run from a panther or a real big bobcat."

Bud offered to show Sarge the way to the slanting tree, point out the cat and watch him pull the popping or cracking stunt. Sarge accepted the offer and started walking back down the trail over which Bud had come. Bud followed him. After walking twenty or thirty steps, Sarge stopped and turned and started back toward the camp, saying as he went, "It might get frightened and run from the two of us and get away. Just in case it might, I'll get Cook's shotgun." Bud waited while Sarge went to the camp and came back with the gun.

The two then walked rapidly to the spot where the cat was last seen by Bud. On the way to the thick wooded area, Sarge expressed doubt about Bud having seen anything larger than a little gray squirrel, or perhaps a fox squirrel.

When the two men arrived at the slanting sapling the bobcat was not where Bud last had seen it. The two men walked around the top of the sapling but found no bobcat or any other living feline. Bud now had dropped fifteen or twenty feet behind as the two approached the slanting tree upon which the bobcat had stood when he spoke in such a threatening manner. Bud now suggested to Sarge that the cat might have walked up the slanting sapling and climbed that crooked dogwood tree growing among the top boughs of the fallen tree. The bobcat was not in the dogwood. Sarge again expressed doubt if Bud had even seen or heard anything bigger than a little screech owl. He then explained to Bud that many people have mistaken a little harmless owl for a cat and been frightened out of their wits because they only took time to see the cat-like heads. Sarge now began to speak sneeringly to Bud about how timid rabbits get frightened at the cry of owls and run for a brier patch for protection. "Why," said Sarge, "any man could lick a little bobcat in a fair fight any time." Bud made no reply other than he was certain that he saw a big bobcat on that fallen tree. The two men walked on passed the clump of bushes a few yards from the dogwood. No sight of a cat was seen or a sound heard. Sarge continued to razz Bud about being afraid to fight a little old bobcat. "Why," said he, "I could lick a little old bobcat bare handed any time and think nothing about it." He continued, "My experience in the war gave me nerves to fight and not cowardice to run. War trains men not to back away from a fight." Bud, as usual, made no reply but took the razzing good naturedly.

Bud was strolling about six feet behind Sarge. Sarge looked around an observed that Bud had armed himself with a large venison-ham pine knot. Sarge then wanted to know if Bud was gathering up pine knots for firewood at the camp. About this time the men came around a cluster of tall bushes. Just as Sarge walked past the cluster a hair-raising yowl was heard. Bud looked up and saw Sarge walking backward and shaking like a bed sheet in a storm. He had Cook's old gun in front of him and doing his best to get its business end pointed toward the bobcat twenty feet away. The cat's back was arched, his teeth bare, his hair all standing straight and threatening hell and damnation with awful yowls. Sarge was retreating backwards as fast as he could walk. Bud yelled, "Throw down your gun and fight him fair. Sarge, do be fair with a little cat like that." Sarge kept walking

backward and the cat kept coming and yowling. Sarge ignored Bud's request to throw the gun down and fight the little kitty fair. Sarge became so nervous the he was unable to find the trigger on the old gun. He kept walking backwards and shaking like a leaf in a storm. The cat took hold of the end of the gun barrel. The sound of teeth chewing on the end of the gun was too much for frightened Sarge. He backed into a small hole that was covered over with fallen pine straw. As he tumbled flat on his back beside Bud he mumbled, "Oh, Lordy, I'm gone," and passed out as if he had fainted or had the breath bumped out of him by the hard fall.

While the old bobcat chewed on the end of the gun, Bud cracked his head with his venison-ham pine knot. He then poked Sarge gently in the flank with the business end of his pine knot. As Sarge caught his breath, Bud said calmly, "Get up Sarge, the cat can't hurt you." As Sarge blinked his eyes, he said, "I got him, didn't I?" "Yes," said Bud, "Cook's old gun failed to fire, but your fall, grunts and groans did the trick. The little sickly kitten passed out when you did." When Sarge saw that the gun had failed to fire, he picked up his hat and the gun and walked off to the camp without uttering a word. Bud picked up the old bobcat and his venison-ham knot and walked off to camp, keeping some distance behind Sarge.

After supper when Bud was saving the big bobcat's hide, Cook saw no shot holes in the hide and became curious to know how the cat was killed. This brought out the facts to the merriment of the camp crew. From then on the words, "Fight Him Fair," became the byword around the camp.

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