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THE KU KLUX DAYS IN YANCEY.

SOME OF THE MORE FAMOUS RAIDS

The Attempt to Chastise Old Bill Brooks as Told by Ben Honeycutt - The Overtaking of Old 'Californy' Described by James Edna - A Big Day in Burnsville - Bill and Old Californy Saved by Their Blankets - Uncle Billy Metcalf Tells of the Dissolution of the Clan - Some Shooting Matches Graphically Described.

Written for **The Observer**.

Because of the terrible oath which haunts the survivor's memory of those direful days, I haven't been able to gather for this paper anything more worthy to be read than some of the ___ noteworthy raids, their results and the clan's final breaking up. Even this was rendered exceedingly difficult, for every fellow, when my questions touched his career too closely, began on something else so trivial that it would certainly have made a sufferer from toothache smile and forget his complaint - for one happy moment. However, if the reader will follow, I can assure him that new things will be revealed as to the character of a mountaineer when he is wrought up, and takes action, things which though causing only a passing interest, will make up for the scanty recollections given.

WHEN ORGANIZED AND HOW BEGUN.

It was probably in '71 (1871) when a whiskered fellow whose name must not be mentioned in connection with the **Ku-Klux** came in and with much eloquence told the people what to do to stop their troubles. Of course they responded readily, the hardy defenders of Jeff Davis and the Southern Confederacy, as who would not who loves home and it untroubled? With eager hands they donned white robes, and with eager hands they piled long and thorny switches. Also with eager hands did the unfortunate offenders against decency and order snatch for a hiding from "dese powers of de dawknness," and the sight of which alone in their ghostly attire prompted, I am sure, more than half the torture which the poor darkey wished to avoid. He declared "fur to goodness that de devil an' his angels, they waz fightin' for his soul," and perhaps he was not entirely wrong, for some huge gentleman touched by the delicate fingers of Dr. Houston would indeed look wonderfully like his Satanic Majesty. As to the actions, no one will deny that they were highly appropriate. White men, and those who were not easily frightened with a pistol or a knife, would sometimes flee from their own comrades as if a hell-hound were after them, and as a case of the kind I must let one Ed Honeycutt tell his experience. He says, to use his very language, "*I went to join 'em one night, an' when I got thar ever' man was rigged up in his white cap an' britches. They looked so scary - fur one was all aflame like the devil - that I made a quick leap to get away. They started after me, ever' man ov 'em. Such a race as we had no mortal man ever seed. I out run 'em and got away. My record is now clear as to whupping niggers, fur I never did join the Ku-Klux.*"

CLASS OF OFFENDERS PUNISHED.

Although there were numerous offences too trivial for the punishment administered, yet there were a great many more of a class which, so long as they continued, justified the clan's existence. Adulterers were deserving attention, likewise horse thieves and robbers. Then, too, there were negroes who had become quite offensive under the league's sweet guidance, some of their wisecracks even going so far as to profess superiority over their late masters. But particularly deserving of attention were those human brutes who, afraid to stay on the battle-field, had run in and committed deviltries innumerable among the defenseless families of their neighbors, and who, when the war ended urged the negro to further violence. These men were led all along by one Esau Shelton, a man who loved to make widows weep by insults against their dead. In one home it was asserted that he had appropriated a sash which was held in fond memory of a husband and lieutenant, and then strutting about in mock dignity ordered his followers to "tear up everything that belonged to the damned rebel." In another he had caused an old man to be beaten almost to death because his sons were good soldiers for the Confederacy. Now, all these things the **Ku-Klux** remembered with due severity, and it is certainly a pleasure to add that Esau Shelton was beaten with many stripes besides having his neck almost broken and every other part of his anatomy kicked vigorously when on a certain occasion in Burnsville he attempted to say something harsh against his treatment.

SOME NOTEWORTHY RAIDS AND THEIR RESULTS.

It was indeed a bad star that looked down upon a crowd of boys one night as they discussed around a straw-_____ in Madison County the importance of chastising old Bill Brooks and his family for certain lies which they had scattered. The leaders selected for the raid proposed were Ben and Bill Honeycutt, young brothers whose arms had oftentimes been lifted against negroes who had deviated a little from their proper course. How this raid was made a failure, and how somebody lost his life in its very bloom, there's but one man perhaps that ever told, and that is Ben, a fellow now with a long brown beard, a very small frame, and a limp that is interesting; also a wit that is incessant. *"Well, me, an' Bill," said he, "an' some more fellers that I hadn't a goin' to tell on - no I hadn't - well, we started out to give 'ole Bill Brooks an' them to there niggers the devil, an' we did. Yes, sir, we did. We whupped 'em with thorny switches, we did, an' made 'em holler, the wimmen, I mean, for we hadn't yet seen ole Brooks, thought he waz gone, you know. Yes, sir, we made 'em holler loud enough to wake up snakes in Mitchell, an' this ye know wuz across the mountain in Madison, that big rich county that I haul lumber through every other day. Yes, sir, we whupped 'em an' whupped 'em an' then started to leave, when ole Brooks, the ole devil, crawled out from under the bed an' struck Bill in the back with an axe. Ever devil of the boys then run, an' the ole black devil started at me, an' I run, too, an' him right after me, an' I run an' run an' run, an' finally at last I dodged 'im an' went back by the house, an' thar stood one o' the black things we'd whupped, an' she wuz a hollerin' an' a prayin' just like she waz a goin' right into the buzzum of ole David er Moses er somebody, an' I just hauled back an' I knocked her right in the mouth, an' run on an' fell, an' ole Brooks cut me in the back with that same ole axe, an' then he run off. I got up, didn't think I 'us much hurt, no I didn't, an' I hunted up Bill, an' helped him along till somebody met us. Then I come back into Yancey an' told the folks that my brother wuz killed, an' we went back into Madison afore I knowed I was hurt serious. Bill died in five er six days; ye see the nigger throwed his axe at him with all his power, an' only struck me a sorter glancing lick as I fell. I'm now a lumber hauler, a hater o' niggers and a voter of the Dimmycrat ticket, yes I am."*

THE JOHN WILSON RAID.

Another raid that bore unfortunate results was that made against a certain John Wilson, better known on account of his unusual size as "Ole California." Besides having been connected with Shelton in his many cruelties, Wilson had resisted arrest for horse stealing, and was making his way toward safety in Tennessee when like a storm the Ku-Klux overtook him. He swore to remember his treatment, and made a desperate struggle to do so, as will be shown by the following account by James Edna, another little fellow who has obliged me with considerable talking. *"Ole California an' his brother, Bill, waz in Burnsville one day, an' a whole lot more people wuz there too; for I reckon it waz sum sort of a big day - court maybe. 'Ole Californy' waz a drinkin', an' soon let out on me, Brother Will an' George for the whupping that the Ku-Klux had given him. Said George wuz the leader of the gang, an' soon there wuz the biggest kind of a row. They had me out at Nelt Wilson's grocery - Nelt wazn't no kin to 'Californy', an' Bill; anyway, he didn't take any stock in their row - an' they fastened me up in the ole grocery. But everybody wuz so drunk in thar that when somebody come in they didn't notice me go out, an' they is plenty of 'em now will swore that I waz in thar all the time. Just as I run out ole Esau Shelton waz a standin' on the porch an' a hollerin' his best, 'Shoot 'em, Californy, damn it, man, they'll kill ye.' I picked up a heavy stick o' wood thet wuz a layin' on the porch, an' I let the ole cuss have it right across the neck, an' somebody else then got in to beatin' on him, an' I reckon' they nearly beat him to death. I run on out into the fight, an' George wuz a cuttin' on Ole Californy just like thunder, an' I grabbed him too, an' he hit me across the shoulder with his ole square barrel navy, but I managed to throw him an' the fact is, me an' George cut him all to pieces. He had shot George Summers about the hip, him and his brother Bill one, an' one of 'em had shot me brother Will a little too, but by the time the people had got the row squashed, Ole Californy an' Bill waz both cut nearly to death. Will done some vigorous fightin', too, an' if they hadn't a' had blankets on 'em the Wilsons would a' sure been killed. O there wuz a big time of it, for thar wuz a heap more fellers into it. John Houston went an' doctored 'em an' he said thar wuz plenty of places that you could see their breath blubber through, an' he told 'em that Will an' George waz both killed sartin, but that night they slipped out o' the house where they had 'em an' got away. John waz a friend to the Ku-Klux, you know, an' if the Wilsons had a' died Will an' George would a' never been found, an' there is plenty o' fellers would a' swore that I waz never out of that ole grocery."*

GREASY BILL'S DEFIANCE.

A great many threats were made and a great many guns loaded to put terror in the clan's way, but none made a moment's impression until there spoke in Madison a certain Mr. Anderson, a white man, who answered to such a sobriquet as "Greasy Bill." This gentleman lived in much happiness with a little hut and a sweet daughter of Ethiopia. His was a life filled to its highest wish, many curly heads lingered against his breast, one lovely heart replied to his, and nobody was attempting to lessen his means with long visits or friendship too imposing. No wonder then that when strange things began to stalk abroad in the night's shadows, Greasy Bill fortified his place of joy and prepared to defend it. No wonder, I say, he

barred the door, made various loopholes, and with two or three muskets and as many "square bar'l navies" jumped up at every sound in the yard. But there was little need of such as this, for the Ku-Klux didn't show their white caps about the cabin that stood fortified. Greasy Bill lived his days without having use for musket or pistol, and his descendants may now be seen in two or three bad boys whose faces show very distinctly their negro blood, and in one dusky' maiden who lately married a white boy, and started for the happy land of California.

THE CLAN'S FINAL BREAKING UP.

"They took in so many bad fellers," said Uncle Billy Metcalf, an old man who, aided by a remarkably clear memory, has served me with many answers, "thet the thing soon leaked out, an' the first thing the boys knowed the revenues wuz right in after 'em. It had lasted prob'ly two or three years, but then as I say the thing busted. Did ye ever notice that things er clans like thet allers bust? The Masons is the only thing thet I think of now that didn't, but then they're built on something good. Well I wuz no full scholar in the Ku-Klux - ye see they've degrees in all such things, take fer instance the Masons; they's degrees in them - but I knowed a heap about their raids an' doins an' things. Some things I know thet I won't never tell, too, because I don't think I can under the terms an' conditions of my oath, be jolly. A heap o' fellers talks too much, but I'm pretty careful because of the terms an' conditions of my oath. The Scriptor says not to 'forswear thyself.' Did ye ever notice that? Well, as I started to tell the revenues got in heer after the boys an' thar wuz sum lively times. Did ye ever notice men gits desperate when they git into such things an' clans? This Ed Ray, thet bad man thet killed so many people why I suppose he killed a little boy because he wouldn't tell whar his daddy wuz - Ed wuz a huntin' of 'im, ye know - he wuz one of the revenues. Well, he got atter John Dodd an' two of the Jervises - let me see their names wuz Landon an' - what wuz the other 'uns name? I can't think jis now - well as I say they got into a little battle. He jumped behind an apple tree, Ed Ray did, an' shot 'em all three, killing one uv the jervises - I believe his name wuz Landon - no, thet 'un wazn't killed, it uz Bob, I believe er somethin' like thet, perhaps it wuz Nelt, ther is a Nelt Jervis. Well, sir, be jolly, John Dodd, ye see he didn't have the judgment about fightin' thet Ed Ray did, hadn't fit so much ye know. Well, sir, he stood right out in the open an' peeled the bark aroun' Ed Ray's head every shot, but finally, as I say, Ed shot 'im square through, an' stopped the little battle. Did ye ever see Ed Ray? No thet wuz before your time - he wuz a mighty good lookin' man, yes he wuz. Did ye ever think about it, a man can't feel the bullet much when he's shot, he feels somethin' like a hot spindle pass through 'im. I know when I wuz a little boy about the size uv this 'un an' Joe Shepperd wuz abusin' old Preston Jones, his uncle, yes he uz his uncle, ole Preston said he'd make Joe feel somethin' like a hot spindle. I thought mighty strange about thet, be jolly, but now I'm satisfied thet it's the truth, fer it's the truth if I'm told right, an' I think I am. About thet time Erv Duck wuz around an' the revenues got after him. They soon got afeerd to tackle him, yes they did. Ed Ray had tried him, an' couldn't take him, no he couldn't, an' he bet with Nuet Keith thet he couldn't take him. 'Why,' sez Keith, 'I can take him with a corn stalk,' and he tried it, for he wasn't no coward, no he wazn't. He met Duck one day, an' told him he had papers fer him, but Duck didn't believe him, prob'ly he'd heard what had passed between him an' Ed Ray, I don't know, an' so he kept a watch on Keith. He had his pistol, Duck did, in a roll of leather that he wuz a kerrin', an' when Keith started off he looked around an' Keith wuz ready to shoot him, had his pistol out ye know. They shot two or three shots apiece, an' Keith wuz killed an' Duck wounded a little. John Houston made 'em think thet he wuz killed beyond a reasonable doubt, an' so Duck got away. They had a guard over him but he got away an' was never cotch. He's alive summers an' doin' well, now, I suppose. The Ku-Klux, er them that had been Ku-Klux, fed him while he 'uz dodgin', but he had a hard time uv it, fer he wuz out a long time with just his night clothes on, ye know, be jolly, an' they come mighty nigh a catch'n him too. Well, that's the way it went. They caught several, but a heap run off. Some wuz put in jail, an' when time for trial come they turned State's evidence, in the hopes of gittin' out of it, ye know. I don't see how they could do it, be jolly, under the terms and conditions of their oath. They swore mighty hard, they wuz, but it never done 'em any good, for everybody got out of it - they didn't do any better than the men that stuck firm. Did ye ever notice it - them that turned State's evidence ye can buy their votes - be jolly ye can. Well finally ever body had to go to Raleigh, an' I heard some several say as they went on lots of ladies would wave their silk handkerchefs an' holler for Duck, 'Hurray for Erv Duck! They wuz mighty proud of him, ye know, their husbands wuz jus' a-head, I suppose. Well, when they all got into Raleigh they wuz afraid to do anything with 'em, be jolly, an' turned 'em loose to come home an' be happy. I wuzn't no full scholar, an so didn't have to go, but , as I say, I know a heap about their raids an' doins, if I'd jis' tell, but I can't under the terms an' conditions of me oath." ALVIN HORTON.



John C. "Californy" Wilson (b. May 8, 1835 – d. January 14, 1909; s/o William "Billy" Wilson and Susannah Bradford) noted in the aforementioned newspaper article, served in the Kirk-Holden War* as 2nd Lieut. Co. E, 2nd Regiment for the NC State Troops under Capt. John H. Wheeler. According to the roster, he was mustered into service on July 14, 1870, age 35 and described as being 6'-1", blue eyes, light hair and fair complexion. The article states it was around 1871 when the "John Wilson Raid" occurred therefore, he would have been on active duty. John survived his cuts/ wounds from the raid. Around 1877, he and his wife, Martha Ann Hensley (d/o Silas A. Hensley and Charlotta "Lottie" Briggs) and his some of his children moved out to Pottersville, Howell County, Missouri to herd cattle but according to a letter he wrote to John Pate in 1878, he became "diseased in the chest and unable to work anymore." Family lore claims he made several trips to California to help out on the wagon trail for which he acquired his nick name. He was noted in the 1850, 1860, 1870, 1880 and 1900 Yancey Co. Censuses and he, wife and all his children noted as being born in NC.

*The Kirk-Holden War arose out of a June 1870 proclamation by NC Republican governor, William Wells Holden, condemning the actions of the Ku Klux Klan and accusing them of murdering North Carolinians and using terror tactics to suppress the vote of both newly enfranchised African Americans and white Republicans. This proclamation was just one incident in an escalating series of conflicts between Holden and North Carolinians who were either members of, or sympathetic to, the Klan during the spring and summer of 1870. This series of conflicts came to be known as "The Kirk-Holden War" and is thought to have played a large part in the Republican Party's later electoral defeat in the state, as well as Holden's December 1870 impeachment and March 1871 conviction. http://docsouth.unc.edu/highlights/holden_kirk.html).