

# Dougherty Rode Around On Gunpowder During First Quarter Of Century



"OLD BOB"

By DALE GADDY

"Old Bob" (Gunpowder) was one of the first horses Professor B. B. Dougherty used as he took to the various rough roads and trails throughout the mountainous area. The two became the best known figures in the entire county, and soon became welcomed wherever they went, for their were errands of helpfulness as they journeyed to the least and farthest out schools and communities.

In his old age he was a fully retired and highly esteemed animal who had already become quite a favorite with faculty, students and the people of the community. The students had jokingly nicknamed him "Gunpowder" although he had become incapable of exhibiting explosive qualities. To the family, of course, he was Old Bob to the end.

No mention of his passing was made in the late autumn issues of the Watauga Democrat in 1928. Maybe folks were too concerned with the Hoover-Smith campaign, and with Will Rogers' Anti-Bunk Party—joshings to pay any mind to the death of a meager horse.

Like most "folks," "Old Bob" (or "Gunpowder," as he was sometimes called) had done nothing bad to cause any publicity for himself. (As one Wataugan has phrased it, "You never read about the good fellows—just them that goes wrong!") There wasn't a bad bone in the old nag who died that fall. Nor was there any record made of the happening in the town's chronicles.

Last week, as a warm March sun thawed the earth's crystal-fingers along the old road bed behind President Plemmons' home, Ed Culler recalled, "Old Bob is buried over there in that opening, somewhere." The small, retired worker pointed to a weed infested field adjacent to the road.

Striding over the lip of the abandoned road, Culler moved across the rolling hill, turned, then stooped to the ground and picked up a sun-bleached bone (see photo). "For all we know, this might be one of Old Bob's bones," Culler said in a serious manner.

Culler, who was employed by ASTC from 1909 until his retirement in 1957, stated that usually he helped bury the deceased livestock owned by the college, but that on the particular occasion when Old Bob was interred he was not alone. "But his grave is here—I'm sure of that."

Walking back from the plot, Culler continued, "Old Bob was a good horse—just as faithful to the college as anyone. Never once did he resist the halter. Just worked like the rest of the horses for what little feed he got."

Recalls Mrs. Annie Ruffy (daughter of D. D. Dougherty, co-founder of ASTC), "Gunpowder was a very gentle horse. We all rode him, but Uncle Blan (B. B. Dougherty) rode him most."

Mrs. Ruffy related that it was her uncle's practice while riding, to stop along the road-side and talk to anyone who happened along. "We used to get a big laugh out of him (Old Bob), Mrs. Ruffy smiled. "Regardless of whether Uncle Blan would pull up or not, Old Bob would stop and wait for a conversation."

"Even if it weren't Uncle Blan who was riding him, Old Bob would stop."

According to the only written account of the life of Old Bob, as far as this writer knows, it was in the spring of

1898 "on Phillip's Branch, one prong of the famous Coye Creek, that Old Bob first saw the light of this wonderful world."

The account which appeared in the 1929 yearbook at ASTC and which was authored by Professor I. G. Greer reveals that Old Bob was a year old when he was sold to the college. A year later B. B. Dougherty, then superintendent of Watauga public schools, chose the young horse for his own transportation.

Wrote Watauga Democrat editor Rob Rivers in the April 28, 1956 issue of the Democrat, ("A Thumbnail History of ASTC," section 2, page 4), "As Bishops Asbury and Spangenburg had earlier horse-backed over wilderness trails to bring solace and spiritual guidance to the early settlements, B. B. Dougherty straddled Gunpowder and set out to arise the money with which to make a break in the cloud of illiteracy which had shrouded the forested glades and valleys . . ."

Prof. Greer, in his 1929 account, said, "Over the rough roads, rock and muddy, they trudged their way to every school house whether in the valley or on the mountain side. Sometimes they were both walking side by side; sometimes Old Bob in the lead, sometimes otherwise."

"Anyway there grew up between these two parties a friendship, strong and steadfast, never to be broken. They

communicated in a language known only to themselves."

When Professor Blan entered the school room, he tucked the bridle reins under the head stall in a neat bow knot. Old Bob grazed contentedly around the school house, "and never dreamed of betraying his comrade. Sometimes he would look in at the window; sometimes he would stand at the door for hours and look in with deep and hearty approval on all that he saw and heard."

"When four o'clock came he would move away from the door and stand on one side and watch the children, happy and gay with their empty dinner baskets under one arm and a multiplicity of books under the other, scatter away to their mountain homes."

The school years went by, one after another. Old Bob carried his kind master through the heat of summer, the chill of autumn, and winter's icy blasts. The old nag hauled wood to the college during the Christmas vacations.

He helped bring in the supplies from the depot ("Tweetsie" Railroad) during the winter and every Saturday evening he pulled the garbage wagon through campus, collecting bits of rubbish to haul to some

ditch which was being filled or improved.

Continued Greer, "Old Bob was always honored and respected by the faculty, the student body, the sextons, workers, and especially by the Board of Trustees, for his faithfulness to duty and his honesty of purpose."

"He did away with every doubt as to whether a horse has intelligence. No one could have watched his movements without knowing that horses think."

"No one could study his life without seeing a picture of altruism most dutiful, but like all creatures here on earth, death must come soon or late."

"It was in the fall of 1928 as the October's frost and November winds began to come that Old Bob's health failed. Every attention including medicine and food, good shelter and good beds, was given to him, but he had done his work. He had served his fellows, he had lived longer than most of those of his kind, and now the end comes."

Old Bob—nicknamed Gunpowder because of his gentleness—was dead. Greer relates that "there was sorrow in every heart and a tear in every eye" when announcement of the horse's death was made in

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morning chapel at the college. A mere horse? "Hardly," Culler said as he descended from the hill where Old Bob is buried. "He was a very dear part to the early heritage of this college and of Boone."

Senator Dirksen again urges the President to cut budget. Farm unit asks spending cut.

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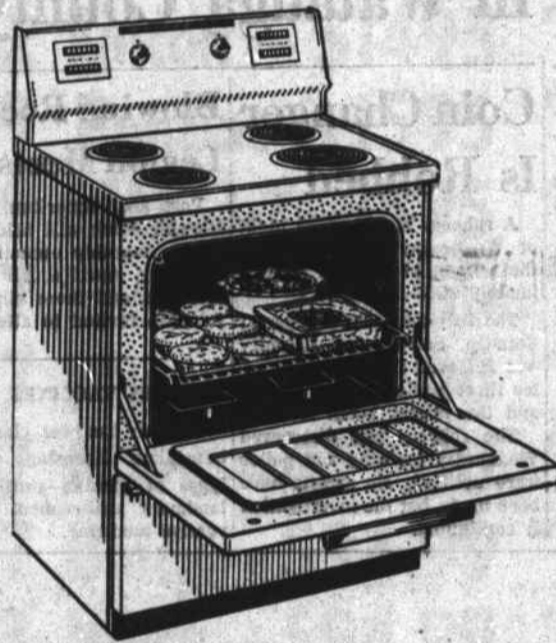


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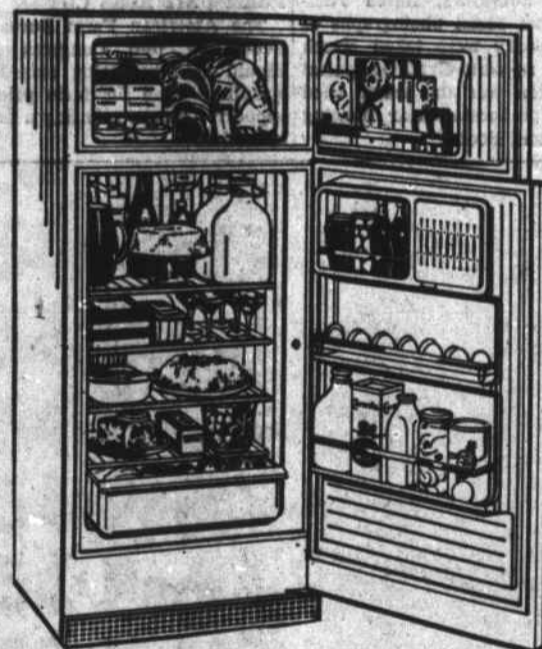
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