

Robeson's Terror in Reconstruction Days

BEING AN AUTHORITY HISTORY OF HENRY BERRY LOWRIE, THE GREAT NORTH CAROLINA BANDIT, AND HIS ASSOCIATES, BY MRS. MARY C. NORMENT, WHOSE HUSBAND WAS KILLED BY THE OUTLAWS. (Republished by Permission.)

PART IV.

Robert McKenzie, Esq.

It was during the month of February, 1865, that they went to the house of this gentleman, and finding all the doors closed and securely fastened, they called loudly to Mr. McK. for admittance. He, with his family seated around the fireside, gave no heed to their demands; whereupon they burst into a panel of the door and crowded through in the roughest manner, going from room to room, turning up beds, pulling open mattresses, breaking boxes, searching bureaus and trunks, behaving after the manner of Sherman's raiders. Falling to find money, which was the object of their search, they of them seized Mr. McKenzie, placed a rope around his neck, and would hang him if he did not produce it they demanded. They went out and consulted with his servants, returned, and in a furious manner renewed the search, calling as before; held another consultation with those in the yard, came in and searched more thoroughly with a like result. They turned to Mrs. McKenzie and told her if she did not give them their money they would hang her husband, and started out with him for this purpose; she screamed and begged them to spare his life. They told her then to tell them where the silver was concealed. She told them they had none, all the time entreating and pleading with them, as only a wife can plead when the life of the one who is all the world to her is at stake. Perhaps it was her agonized appeals that touched their stony hearts and caused them to desist from their fiendish purpose. They too, had wives and little ones, and it is to be hoped that, notwithstanding their many crimes, they were not wholly lost to the influence of home affection. After releasing Mr. McKenzie from custody they took his watch, (a fine gold one) dishes, knives, spoons, clothing bed-clothing and everything of value that they could carry.

When the band became disorganized from the killing of their leader, the Federal prisoners who belonged to the band made their escape to their Northern homes. On their way to Wilmington one of them was conversing with a lady on the train and acknowledged to her that he had been with the robber gang in Robeson county, and as a proof of it showed the watch of Mr. McKenzie, which he had in his possession.

Allen Lowrie lived in less than a mile of Mr. McK., and continued to annoy him in almost every way possible, robbing his smoke-house, gin, pantry, cutting and spoiling his fruit trees, grape arbors, &c. He finally moved away from his plantation, and went to Florence, South Carolina, where he continued to reside up to the time of his death, in the fall of 1872. A brother of Mr. McKenzie took charge of his plantation in Robeson and fared but little better so far as robberies were concerned. They were trying his hogs off one morning. He followed them. They told him to go back, but he refused. They turned and fired on him, wounding him in the leg, which disabled him for some time. He finally left the place with Mr. Phipkin in charge. They did not trouble him so much, but he frequently met them around the place and they were several times at his house, but offered no personal injury. At one time H. B. Lowrie hung his cane of brandy on the fence and went off, forgetting it. He, however, returned in a few days and found it as he had left it, but being very cautious, and knowing he justly deserved death at the hands of the Robesonians, concluded that his brandy might possibly be drugged. He called on Mr. P. to take a drink before he would touch it. Mr. P. told him it was not poisoned unless he (H. B. L.) had done it. He told him he had not. He then drank some, thus setting the fears of the outlaw at rest.

Mr. Dugald McCallum.

Sometimes in February, 1865, the family of Mr. McCallum were very much startled by a band of armed men in their dwelling, numbering from eighteen to twenty-four white men, the balance mulattoes. They called for supper, which was prepared and set for them in the dining-room. Before calling in all their band to supper, those that were in the house lowered the curtains of the windows, tucking them down at the sides in order to prevent the family from seeing and recognizing the Lowries. After eating their supper they proceeded to search the different rooms of the house thoroughly, throwing the things from the windows to the party on the outside. Here they robbed the ladies' wardrobe, an act they had omitted at any of their preceding visits at other places. The family of Mr. McCallum were at that time in the army, and he, a gray-headed citizen, the sole protector of his wife and two daughters. They took his clothing, guns, and seven hundred dollars in Confederate money, which was almost valueless, being a short time before the surrender. A lot of

clothing, bed-clothing and a purse of silver comprised the balance of their booty on this occasion. They had a quarrel over the silver, in the yard, before leaving. After their search was completed, they prepared to convey away their gains by going to the horse-lot and harnessing two horses to separate buggies, and removed the things to some place of deposit and continued their raid by visiting the house of Messrs. John McCallum and Robert Graham.

Mr. John McCallum.

They reached this place about 11 o'clock. Mr. McCallum and his niece were the only white persons on the premises, and the first intimation they had of the presence of this marauding party was the report of a pistol on the front piazza of their dwelling. The yard dog felt the effects of this, as he was found dead the next morning in the piazza. They called loudly to Mr. McCallum to open the door, threatening him in a rough manner; he very reluctantly admitted them, about thirty in number, as near as he could guess. They stationed a guard at every door, and the parlor was crowded with them. The white men told Mr. McC. that they were escaped Federal prisoners. They would only allow a dim light, and when that would chance to fall on their faces, they would immediately drop their blankets over them. They were very profane, and showed no respect for age or sex. They thoroughly searched the house, upper and lower story, emptied all the bureaus and trunks, taking every key on the place. They did not leave a change of wearing apparel, and scarcely any bed-clothing. Two guns and nearly everything else of value that could be carried off conveniently, was taken. After they completed their search, a few of the party went down to Mr. Robert Graham's, taking a horse and buggy, with one of the negroes to drive it, and the balance remained there until their return. They came back before day and demanded of Mr. McCallum his money and brandy. He told them that he did not have any; whereupon, they cursed and threatened to kill him if he did not produce it. They compelled him to accompany them to his gin-house, taking with them a lighted candle to search in the cotton for it. They would make him dig down in the cotton, while they stood sticking the burning candle to it. He begged them not to burn it, and kept trying to assure them that he had neither money or brandy. The negro boy who had accompanied the party to Mr. Graham's told them that his master had something concealed in his gin-house, and he thought it was money and brandy. For this reason they renewed the search on their return. Meeting with no success, and it then being near daylight, they took their departure, still retaining the negro, horse and buggy in their service. The boy returned in a few hours, but was too much intoxicated to tell anything about it.

Mr. John Purcell lived about a half mile from Mr. McCallum's, on their direct route home, and in passing there T. C. Bridgers was standing in the piazza, and they saluted him by firing a pistol into the house, the ball passing just over his head. They never at any time entered the dwelling of Mr. Purcell, but his gin, store and smoke-house were robbed several times by the gang. They were often seen in the day lurking around his plantation. Mr. P., in the Spring of 1872, came upon Steve Lowrie asleep in the corner of the fence, with his gun standing a short distance from him. This was near the house of a family of mulattoes, who were Mr. Purcell's tenants. Steve, no doubt, was waiting for his breakfast, as the family were known not only to cook and wash for him, but also to give the band all the information they could gather. They were near relatives of the Strong and Lowries. The same day that Mr. Purcell saw Steve Lowrie, he, with Andrew Strong, went to the house of Mr. Henry McCallum, a son of Mr. John McCallum, and took his gun and watch. Mrs. McCallum asked them to give her the watch, and they did it.

Thus, for years, they continued to roam the country, day and night, plundering, dropping in here and there when least expected. The citizens were afraid to let more than one or two at a time into a plan to capture them; the friends of the gang were so numerous, scattered throughout the country, that it was impossible to make a move without their becoming apprised of it. Their friends were as loud in denunciation of them as their enemies; for this reason it was impossible in many cases to discover between the two.

Mr. Robert Graham.

When the party, fifteen or twenty in number, which left Mr. McCallum's for Mr. Graham's, reached there it was between twelve and four o'clock in the morning. They immediately posted sentinels in and around the yard, and on every road leading to the house, with instructions to allow no one to pass in, out, or advance from

any direction. These warlike orders were issued and obeyed with promptness. Some of the band—three whites, the other mulattoes—rushed into the piazza of the dwelling, and with loud oaths and threats, demanded admittance. None of the family were at home except Mr. Graham and his daughter. He went to the door and asked who it was and what they wanted. They replied with horrid oaths for him to open the door, saying if he did not they would set fire to his house. Hearing this awful threat, he opened the door; they went in, at once making him prisoner, at the same time demanding his guns, ammunition, and every key on the place. This demand was made by a white man, who termed himself Captain. After getting the guns and keys in possession, they lighted their candles, with which they seemed well supplied, and proceeded to plunder and ransack the house of many valuables. In this they seemed to be well disciplined, as they would take according to rank, viz: Captain, first of the most valuable articles, and so on. The three white men being all officers, had the best of the spoils, consisting of money to the amount of two thousand dollars, a purse of silver, a watch which Mr. Graham prized very highly, having worn it from boyhood, several pieces of jewelry belonging to different members of the family, and also the rings from Miss Graham's fingers. The privates all being well supplied with large bags and haversacks, took wearing apparel of every description, bed-clothing, boots, shoes, hats, etc. After they had completed their search they ordered supper to be prepared immediately, with directions how and what to prepare; they then ordered Mr. Graham and his daughter to take seats in the parlor for their entertainment. None were allowed to enter except the officers, the privates being left out in the cold, who, by the way, seemed highly elated over the spoils they had captured. After some time spent in asking Mr. Graham (the old man, as they called him) many questions about his sons in the army, war matters and the "rebs" generally, they told him that he or his daughter had to go with them as prisoners of war. This they positively refused to hear, when some of the officers proposed to take them by force, and put a handkerchief around Miss Graham's neck for this purpose, when the Captain, with a military air, ordered that no violence should be used. To this they quietly yielded. Finding that their time (night) was limited, they issued orders to prepare to leave, not waiting for supper, as they had countermanded their orders to have it prepared. This was supposed to have been done for fear that some of the servants would recognize their colored soldiery, which was afterwards found to be true.

On leaving they went to the smoke-house and helped themselves to the largest bacon hams they could find. Here the captain again interfered, saying: "Boys, we have done enough here, let us go." They took one or two hams, and said they would be back in a few nights for a large supply of bacon and corn. They made ready to leave, which was to Mr. Graham the most agreeable part of their night's proceedings. In bidding them good night, the Captain handed Mr. Graham one of his guns, first discharging it, then breaking the rammer and throwing the flint away, saying: "Take this, old man, it will do to shoot the robbers with; they are becoming very troublesome these war times, and everybody should be prepared for them." After this piece of advice, they left for headquarters, then in the Back Swamp.

Calvin Oxendine.

On evidence of John Dial, a member of the robber clan, but who turned State's evidence against the clan, Calvin Oxendine was arrested and lodged in Wilmington jail with Steve Lowrie and George Applewhite, as one of their number, at the time of the robbery and murder of ex-Sheriff King. Calvin refused to leave jail with them at the time of their escape, alleging afterwards as his reason, that he was innocent and would be proven so on trial. He being cousin to the outlaws, did not believe that he could get a fair trial in Robeson, his native county, where all their bloody scenes were enacted; it was therefore removed to Smithville, in Brunswick county, where he proved an alibi by a gentleman from Richmond county, in whose employ he had been, and was at the time of the said robbery and murder. He also proved by the same gentleman a good character for honest industry, that the evidence of the notorious Dial was discredited by the jury, and consequently a verdict of "not guilty" was rendered, and he was acquitted.

He was brother to Henderson Oxendine, the only outlaw that died on the gallows.

Mr. Daniel Baker Shot.

On November 18th, 1866 (Monday night) the Lowrie Bandits visited the house of Mr. Daniel Baker who resides about two miles from the Red Banks Bridge across Lumber river. Here they commenced plundering, taking cotton from his cotton house, etc. Mr. Baker discovering them, ordered them away, whereupon they fired on him, shattering the bones in his right leg so terribly that amputation had to be resorted to in order to save his life, which was successfully accomplished soon after the occurrence by Dr. W. D. McCallum, the family physician. Now this act of the Lowrie bandits was nothing more nor less than wanton cruelty, inasmuch as Mr. Baker was their neighbor and friend. A more industrious, hard-working, clever and kind-

hearted man could not be found in the county than was Mr. Daniel Baker, yet this act of the Lowrie bandits made him a cripple for life, and hastened doubtless his earthly career, for he suffered much pain ever afterwards until death released him from his sufferings.

Mr. Angus S. Baker.

On the 1st of November, 1871, the Lowrie robbers went to the residence of Mr. Angus S. Baker, broke into his house about 9 o'clock P. M., arrested Mr. Baker and wife, and ransacked the house, taking beds, bedding, blankets and wearing apparel, in short, everything of value they could find, and left about 2 o'clock A. M., with their plunder for Scuffletown.

Mr. Malloy McPhaul.

In the year 1868, the robber clan would sometimes employ artifice to gain access into dwellings to obtain such articles of food or clothing as they deemed necessary. As an instance of their cunning, I give the following particulars of a visit by them to Mr. McPhauls: A white man, appearing to be a traveler, called at his house and told him he was from Whiteville (the county-seat of an adjoining county, where a brother of Mr. McPhaul resided) that his brother was at the point of death and desired him to go down immediately if he wished to see him alive. Mr. McPhaul made arrangements to take the first train; arriving at his brother's, what was his surprise at finding him in excellent health; he at once understood the ruse that had been employed at his expense; with a mind filled with dread forebodings and distracting fear, not knowing to what indignity his family had been subjected, hastened back home. He was, however, much relieved to find them unhurt, although the robbers had been there in his absence. After he was fairly on his way to his brother's, a party of three men went to his house and demanded the keys of the smoke house of his wife, which she refused to give them, but offered to unlock the door for them to which they consented. They took bacon and other articles of food, then left without further molestation.

The Murder of Ex-Sheriff Reuben King

On the night of the 23rd of January, 1869, the quiet little village of Lumintown consternation by the startling intelligence that Sheriff Reuben King, in Robeson county, was thrown had been shot in his own house (one and a-half miles from Lumberton) by the Lowrie gang, afterwards known as the outlaws. The gang at this time was composed of Stephen, Thomas and Henry Berry Lowrie, Andrew and Boss Strong, George Applewhite, Shoemaker John, William Chavis, Henderson and Calvin Oxendine, Zack McLaughlin and John Dial.

They had been concealed near the house all day, watching for Sheriff King. Late in the afternoon King returned from the village, and while seated at his fireside, part of the band entered his house with the intention (it is supposed) of robbing the Sheriff. Henry Berry, who led the van, approached him with his gun presented, and demanded of the Sheriff his money. Had he complied with the bandit's demand, his life would probably have been spared; but King instantly sprang up and seized the gun of the robber chief and refused to give up his money. It has been admitted that the intention of the gang was merely to get money, and not to kill the Sheriff. The impression was that he had a large amount of money on his person or in his house, but they were sadly disappointed, as will be shown hereafter.

In the scuffle that ensued between the robber chief and the Sheriff, the gun was discharged, the contents passing through the floor. George Applewhite, who was at the time standing on the piazza, near the door, rushed to the rescue of his comrade by firing a navy revolver at King, the ball taking effect in his back, under the right shoulder blade, lodging in the lung. Mr. S. E. Ward, a neighbor, was on a visit to the family for the night, and at the time the shooting occurred was sitting by the fire near a table. He arose from his seat and raised his arm, when John Dial fired at him, the load of shot taking effect in his arm and side, inflicting a very painful, though not dangerous wound. They then proceeded to search the house, breaking open trunks, drawers, etc., carrying off a large quantity of wearing apparel, bed-clothing and other articles, many of which were afterwards found in George Applewhite's house and identified as those taken the night of the wounding of the Sheriff. Some of the bed-clothing was produced as evidence in the subsequent trial of the parties for the murder of Sheriff King, and indeed was one of the strongest links in the evidence against them. The robbers had disguised themselves by blacking their faces, etc., and consequently escaped detection by the family or Mr. W. Taking advantage of the confusion and fright their appearance and outrages had occasioned, they made well their escape.

Physicians were immediately summoned, who carefully examined the wounded men, and pronounced Mr. Ward's case not at all serious, but not so Sheriff King's. The deadly weapon in the hands of the fell assassin had made sure its aim and entered a vital part. The wounds of the sheriff were found to be mortal. With blanched cheeks and agonized hearts, relatives and friends received this decision of the physicians. The fiat had gone forth—Sheriff King must die; he would live a month, perhaps six weeks. He lingered seven weeks and died, such a death—by the hands of a band of des-

peradoes, in the midst of his family, and at his own hearth. Ah! methinks if there is punishment greater meted to one than another, it will certainly be inflicted on those midnight assassins who committed crimes of the blackest dye.

Every effort was made to capture the murderers, but without success. The dense swamps of Robeson county (impenetrable to all save the outlaws) afforded them protection from justice for some time. After a while, however, Henry Berry Lowrie was prevailed upon to surrender to Sheriff Howell and Dr. Thomas, Agent of the Freedmen's Bureau. John Dial was arrested by Deputy Sheriff McDonald. George Applewhite was arrested at Red Banks; Shoemaker John was also arrested, and Dial became State's evidence in the murder of ex-Sheriff King. Stephen Lowrie, Calvin and Henderson Oxendine were also arrested and confined in Wilmington jail, tried, convicted and sentenced to be hanged; but an appeal was taken to the Supreme Court. As is often the case, before the decision of said appeal, Henry Berry and Steve Lowrie, George Applewhite, Henderson and Calvin Oxendine, effected an escape from jail and took up their abode in the swamps of Robeson county—thence arose the band of outlaws. Their escape from the Wilmington jail is, and ever will remain, enveloped in mystery to those outside of the parties who aided and abetted them. The jail, it must be remembered, was a very strong one, closely guarded, and the jailer residing within its walls, though this is only one of the many mysteries connected with the proceedings of the "Lowrie Band."

After Sheriff King was wounded he removed his money from his pocket, placing it under the collar of his coat, to prevent the robbers from getting it. He was detected in the act by one of the robbers, and they succeeded in getting about \$155 in currency and \$20 in gold. At the time they were searching the house, the Sheriff was lying in the door, beseeching some one to give him water. The family had left the premises through fright, and not one of that merciless band would gratify his request, but heaped curses and abuses on him, telling him he ought to have died long ago, &c.

Mr. David McKellar.

In May, 1869, the robber clan visited the house of Mr. McKellar, in his absence, and took three hundred and fifty (\$350) dollars and some clothing.

Henry Bullock, Sr.

In May, 1869, early in the evening, Mr. Bullock was surprised by several men disguised as negroes coming into his field where he was superintending his farm hands. He was an aged veteran of the war of 1812, and though he was ninety-five years of age at the time of their visit, was able to attend to his farm. One of the clan walked up to the old man, and notwithstanding his age and feebleness, jerked him around, ordering him to go to the house and give them his money. He told them he had no money, but could go to the house with them. On their way they had to cross a fence; they did not allow the decrepit old man time to get over the fence, but pushed him over. When they got to the house they ordered the old gentleman and his wife to go in and left his laborers under guard in the yard. They arrested all who chanced to pass the house while they were there, and kept them under guard until they left. In their search they found thirty (\$30) in specie belonging to Mrs. Bullock, which they appropriated. They carried off all his valuable papers, clothing, bed-clothing and provisions to a large amount. They found a jug of brandy in the house, and before they would drink any themselves, compelled the old lady to drink a glass of it pure. They no doubt thought it was drugged, and used this precaution to ascertain. They cursed the old people in a shocking manner. You reader, can picture in your own imagination, after reading this one short sketch, the character of the gang with whom the people of Robeson had to contend. Age and decrepitude could claim no mercy at their hands, but regardless of all—reckless of all save their own inordinate love of plunder, they rose up, sometimes in one place to-day, ten miles hence to-morrow, casting a shadow, throwing a gloom around many a hearthstone in a large portion of Robeson.

Mr. M. K. Griffin.

This was the next house they visited in that neighborhood; they were also in disguise, and armed with double-barreled guns. They rushed into the yard with guns presented, and took Mr. Griffin prisoner, at once demanding his money, cursing and using abusive language towards him. There were only three at his house; they searched his person, placed one of their number to guard him, while the other two proceeded to search the house. They took all of his and his wife's most valuable clothing and his gun; they afterwards threw the gun into the garden and left it. They inquired of Mr. G., about his neighbors; the number of men about the different houses, their strength of arms, &c. When they started off they turned to Mr. G., with an oath, and told him to stay at home that night, or they would see him again if he did not. The wife of Mr. Griffin was so badly frightened that she has never recovered from the effects of it.

Mr. George Williams.

In the year A. D. 1869, the robber gang went to Mr. Geo. Williams' and broke a door down that was on the

front side of the house, and fired at one of his sons, but did not hit him. The family fled, and left the house and its contents in their possession; they however took nothing off. The firing at young Mr. Williams seemed to have been merely venting their ire on account of some old grudge.

Mr. William C. McNeil.

Among the many families harassed by the "Lowrie Band," there were few that suffered to the same extent as Mr. W. C. McNeil, one of Robeson's most quiet, inoffensive and law-abiding citizens. Living as he did on the very borders of their settlement, he was more frequently subjected to their insults and depredations than those more distant, and being also a well-to-do farmer, his larder and farmyard possessed for them great attractions. Mr. McNeil had also incurred their marked displeasure by freely expressing his opinion and treating with the utmost contempt this band and all that he knew to be its friends.

Their first visit to his house was in 1869, at which time they entered his pantry and dining-room, relieving them of all available articles and eatables, which was to Mr. McNeil and family a considerable loss; this act of lawlessness supplied their homes with many useful articles and themselves with many necessities and luxuries.

In the early part of 1870 they again entered his dining-room, (which had been returned) stripped it as before of every available article. On this visit they attempted an entrance to his smoke-house by digging underneath it and trying to open it with false keys, (having a goodly number of them) but failing to affect an entrance here they quietly left, no doubt to attempt it somewhere else.

One night in 1872, Mr. McNeil was out walking in his lane, hearing footsteps in the direction of his barn, and suspecting who they were, he hastily concealed himself in order to learn their intentions; he had not long to wait; immediately one man walked to the barn and endeavored to open it; Mr. McNeil called out twice to know who they were; receiving no answer he told them if they did not leave he would force them to; one answered "do you know to whom you are talking?" Recognizing the voice he made no reply, but returned to the house, took his gun and again went out; they in the meantime had left the barn and repaired to a corner of the fence nearer the house; as Mr. McNeil walked out they halted him? he again asked "who are you?" one with an oath cried out, "it is Lowrie."

Mr. McNeil at once commenced retracing his steps into the house when they fired at him; the contents of the gun passed him, lodging in the breast of his beautiful daughter and accomplished wife, inflicting painful though not dangerous wounds. Mrs. McNeil and her daughter were standing on the piazza anxiously watching the husband and father when the shot was fired. On the following day, Henry Berry Lowrie visited Moss Neck, a depot on the Carolina Central Railway and within a few hundred yards of Mr. McNeil's residence; he denied all knowledge of the shooting, and expressed great indignation at the guilty parties for having shot two ladies; he sent for Mr. McNeil to go to the depot, he wanted to tell him that he did not do it, but he (Mr. McNeil) refused to see or to have anything whatever to say to him.

On the next day he again visited Moss Neck, and was under the influence of liquor; he seemed to be excited, and several times asserted that he did shoot at Mr. McNeil and tried his best to kill him.

Their visits to this family did not yet cease; frequently they made raids on their fowl-house, helping themselves lavishly to all it contained. On their return from one of those raids, they called at Mr. Dugald McCormick's passing themselves for a squad of men in search of the outlaws, and requested him to accompany them; he not being satisfied as to their identity made some excuse to remain at home; they then gave him a bucket demanding some flour; he gave them some and they went off making no other demands.

The Murder of Mr. O. C. Norment.

On the night of the 19th of March, A. D. 1870, a quarter to 9 o'clock, Mr. Norment was shot in his yard, only a few feet from the door. The party who committed this deed had stationed themselves at each corner of the house, and had entered the yard by taking down the palings of the enclosure, just large enough for one man to crawl through at a time. I suppose the family would have heard the noise of the drawing out of the palings, had it not been for the noise of the children frolicking with their father at the time. Circumstances seemed to favor them on this occasion. With the laughter of innocence ringing in their ears, they took their position to commit the deed so horrible to relate. Mr. Norment was in the habit of putting his children to sleep by telling them little nursery stories, and took them to the bed nearest the murderer for this purpose, little thinking so soon his home would be made desolate, and the place desecrated, yet made memorable to his stricken family by the life-blood of his husband and the father. The fiend who stood there and listened to the merry laughter and innocent prattle of his little ones, with the dark purpose in his heart of taking from them their kind and loving father in so cruel a manner, must have had a heart of