

How Old Is John?

What is the Truth about Old Uncle John Shell, of Greasy Creek, Kentucky? Is He "The Oldest Living Man" or Only a Youngster of 95 to 100 Summers?

INVESTIGATOR'S REPORT

THE age-old puzzle, "How old is Ann," is now put into the shade by the question lately agitated in the public press as to "How old is John?" Old "Uncle" Johnny Shell, the Kentucky mountaineer, who paid a visit to the Kentucky State Fair at Louisville last fall, has become famous overnight as a result of this controversy.

Such papers as the "New York Herald", the "Literary Digest", and other periodicals of national circulation, have printed his picture, with comments on the question at issue. So much interest has been shown in the matter, that a special investigator was sent to Greasy Creek, Kentucky, by The Chattanooga Medicine Company (whose medicine—Thedford's Black-Draught Lifer Medicine—had been used in the Shell family for many years) in order to get more information on the subject.

The investigator's report is given on another column of this page. The results of this investigation seem to show, on the testimony of friends and neighbors, that John Shell is about 112 years old, that his health is good for a man of his age, and that his mind is clearer than that of the average centenarian.

A statement from his grandson (A. H. Shell) regarding the use of Thedford's Black-Draught, by John Shell himself, is given at the foot of this page.

The breadth picture shows Uncle John Shell's home at Greasy Creek, Kentucky, where he has lived for 55 years. His first wife died here, at the age of 107 years.

FACTS vs. FICTION

JOHNSHELL is without doubt the most remarkable centenarian I have seen, and he is about the eighth I have met," says our investigator. "His memory is wonderful. The nearest that he and his family can come to his age is 112 years. His family has never claimed him to be over that age. The tax records that were burned in the court house at Harlan gave the date of his birth, as near as they could make it out, as September, 1808. He also counts from the age of his first wife, who died at the age of 107.

"John Shell cannot read or write, but for many years he was an expert maker of flint-lock rifles. John Shell rifles, marked with his private mark just behind the lock, are prized by collectors.

"In order to get a consensus of opinion as to his probable age, I thought it best to secure statements and affidavits from members of the family and neighbors, who have known him for many years. I therefore secured such statements from Judge A. B. Cornett, T. H. Howard, attorney-at-law, and W. B. Kelly, ex-United States Marshal, and others. These are among the most substantial and reliable men of Kentucky."

Extracts from their statements are given below.

Over 100, Says W. B. Kelly

I have known "Uncle" Johnny Shell for years. In fact, stayed with him a good deal, about 16 years ago. From the age Mr. Shell claimed to be, when I stayed with him, and the time that has elapsed since, I would judge him to be a good deal over 100 years old.

W. B. KELLY,
Ex-United States Marshal.

Subscribed and sworn to before me this April 24th, 1920.

E. F. BOGGEN, Notary Public, Harlan Co., Ky.

Shell Family Record Says 112

My Aunt, Mrs. Martha Garrison, says that the date in her Bible, containing grandpa's age, was September 15, 1808. I have every reason to believe that she speaks the truth. My father, W. C. Shell, says this is the truth so far as he has ever known; also my uncle, A. B. Shell.

A. H. SHELL.

Subscribed and sworn to before me this 26th day of April, 1920.

G. W. HOWARD, County Court Clerk.

At Least 110, Says T. S. Ward

I will be 81 years old the 10th of July, 1920. I was born and raised in Harlan County, Kentucky. In 1831 I met Johnny Shell, who was called "Uncle Johnny" then. I was dodging the Confederate army and met "Uncle Johnny". He was too old then for service in the Civil war. I am satisfied he is at least 110 years old, as he is a much older man than I am. Most every one in Harlan County knows me and will take my word for anything I say. I would not make a statement unless I believed it to be true.

T. S. WARD.

Subscribed and sworn to before me, this 23rd day of April, 1920.

M. G. SMITH, Notary Public, Harlan Co., Ky.

Attorney Howard Says Over 100

In different conversations with John Shell, he told me about coming to Kentucky with his father in the summer of 1814, and that they camped where the town of Hadin, Ky., is now located, and that at that time he was 12 years old. In abstracting old land papers I found one where an entry was made by S. Shell (John's father) in the year 1816, in the neighborhood where he now lives. I have every reason to believe John Shell is a good deal over 100 years old.

T. H. HOWARD, Attorney at Law.

Subscribed and sworn to before me, this 23rd day of April, 1920.

M. G. SMITH, Notary Public, Harlan Co., Ky.

Over 100 and an Honest Man

I have known Johnny Shell for about 50 years. I have sold him goods for 40 years. W. B. Kelly told of a man Smith. He and Shell grew up together, about the same age. If Smith had lived he would be a little over a hundred now. Richard Wilson, who was raised a few miles from Shell, says Shell has turned 100. I talked to Shell last year. He knew me and talked to me as intelligently as I ever heard him. I have always found John Shell an honest man.

S. C. HOWARD.

Judge Cornett Says All of 108

I have known "Uncle Johnny" Shell for 30 or more years. I have known of him as an old, old man. From all reports from the few who lived here when he said he came here at the age of about 12, he is now at least 108 years old, and I believe older. I have talked with him in the last year and he seemed to be intelligent and just as rational as I ever saw him.

Judge A. B. CORNETT, Harlan, Ky.

"Older Than My Mother, 104"

I have known "Uncle Johnny" Shell all my life. I am about 88. I would place his age at 104. Johnny Shell was older than my mother, and she would have been 104 had she lived till now.

F. G. LEWIS.

In justice to John Shell and his family, it should be said that neither he nor they have ever claimed the extreme old age that was given in some of the reports published in the daily press. A story of the kind grows in the telling, and the desire for something startling to make good reading is no doubt the cause for the interesting fiction (founded on fact) that has been published about old "Uncle" Johnny Shell.

Facts, however, in many cases, are just as interesting as fiction, and we have endeavored in this article to give the facts as we have been able to find them.

THE CHATTANOOGA MEDICINE CO.



John Shell turning a grindstone for his five-year-old son, Albert, to sharpen a jack-knife.

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JOHN SHELL AND FAMILY
John Shell, his second wife and 5-year-old son. Also A. H. Shell, grandson of John Shell, his wife and their two daughters.

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OLD "UNCLE" JOHN SHELL

A Remarkable Old Mountaineer.
Now Living at Greasy Creek, Kentucky.

Was thought by some to be 131 years old, but a full investigation does not disclose any reliable records going back so far.

Statement by John Shell's Grandson

A. H. Shell, aged 45, of Chappell, Kentucky, grandson of John Shell, whose picture is shown in the group at top of this page, authorized publication of the following statement:

"My grandfather has lived to a remarkable age. When a young man, he took very little medicine. Of late years he has needed medicine and my wife has looked after it for him. . . . He needed something as a laxative and to keep his liver acting, so she sends to the store for

THEDFORD'S BLACK-DRAUGHT

and makes him a tea from that and it keeps him in splendid shape."



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L.A.