

JAMES DONAHOE McQUEEN, LONE WOLF

Who, By Act of Legislature, Received \$5,000 Reward for Killing Boss Strong, Much Feared Leader of the "Lowry Gang."

By M. L. JOHN, Laurinburg, N. C.

The whole Lumber River and Little Pee Dee section of the Carolinas had for years been terrorized by the "Lowry Gang," from its haunts in Scuffletown, Robeson county, as a center of operations. "The gang" had been hunted unsuccessfully by the military forces of the Confederate States, of North Carolina, and of the United States. The dread name "Lowry Gang" was used along with that of "Bloody Bones" to frighten children in a great area of southeastern North Carolina. The period of terrorism extended over ten years—from 1864 to 1874. But the wiles and audacity of one man turned the tide—one man who had adopted the tactics of the Indian himself and broken the hold of the outlaw band upon the community, and saw the dread band gradually fall into subsidence, their leaders killed or become fugitives. This was James Donahoe McQueen.

James Donahoe McQueen lived in Laurinburg for a number of years before he died, and while he did not have much legal work to be done, the writer did all that he wanted done, and McQueen was in his office several times. And as I write there is before me a copy of statement McQueen made as to the killing of Boss Strong, made and signed by him shortly after the killing, and before he was able to collect the \$5,000.00 reward authorized by the legislature. As it was impossible for McQueen to deliver the body to the authorities, it was necessary to have a special act passed to authorize the payment, and waive the bodily delivery of the dead outlaw.

James McQueen was born in Richmond county, and being deprived of the care on the part of his father early in life, he was reared largely by one of the name of Donahugh, or Donahue, or Donahoe, by which name he was often called. It is said that the name of the family was originally the first of the three variants, Donahugh, and later became Donahue, finally brought to Donahoe. McQueen remained with Donahoe until almost grown, when he entered the Confederate army. Coming from the army, he engaged in farming, then as overseer for a man in South Carolina. When he was about twenty-five years of age he decided to hunt the Lowries. He was methodical and also rather eccentric. However, he must have known the difficulties ahead of him, from the careful way he went about getting his knowledge in hand to make a successful hunt. He went into the "Scuffletown" country, infested by the bandits, and posed as one seeking to buy or rent land. He would make careful investigation of land and the roads and paths and even the by-paths, also swamp area, creeks, marshes, etc., and learn who were the neighbors, and learn whenever possible, who was friendly and who was to be trusted by him and who was also friendly to and to be trusted by the Lowry band. He would make his examination, collect his information, and find the land unsuitable, the price too high or some other seemingly worthwhile objection to it, that made him refuse such offers of land or rentals as would be actually made him. This prepared him to go into the neighborhood as a hunter of the outlaws, with detailed information, and it was said that he could travel as quietly and with as little exposure of person to sight of others as almost any of the Indians in the section. It is true that he often made his advancements for miles without going out into the open on the main roads, because he knew all the by-roads and short cuts.

Then McQueen, after getting his information, engaged with others in the hunt, but soon found that their movements as a party could not be kept secret or hidden from the people in the community in sympathy with the Indians, and very often pensioners of the outlaws; so he cut loose from the organized hunting parties and went hunting as a "lone wolf." He kept his own counsel. His procedure was to go to the home of some man who he knew was to be trusted, and sleep as long as he needed to sleep, and then late in the afternoon when he was to start on another vigil he would ask for food to be cooked, selecting the kinds to be cooked for him, and especially asking that the meat have very little salt in it, and that no food be highly seasoned with salt. This, he said, was necessary for it was practically impossible for him to carry an abundant supply of water, and thirst would drive him out of his hiding much quicker than hunger. And he was loath to drink any surface water, knowing that disease might lurk therein and do for him what hunger and thirst alone could not. He asked for from three to even five days store of food at

times, and late in the afternoon or after dark, would set out, saying that his friends would see him only when he had used up the food, or been successful in his hunt. He did not go the second time in succession, as a rule, to the same house for food, for fear that some one had reported his whereabouts, or that he had been seen coming from the last house where lodged and fed, and he might find on his return that his coming back was anticipated and some one or more of the gang might be waiting to get him. He said in part in his "statement":

"Last Thursday night, March 7th, (it was 1872), I reached the house of Andrew Strong, on the edge of Scuffletown, about ten miles from Shoe Heel, (now Maxton), at 12 o'clock. I fixed a good "blind" about 150 yards from the house, and lying down I watched the rest of the night and all of the next day, eating some provisions I had brought along. About half past seven p. m., Friday, Andrew Strong came out of the woods, and, after stopping and looking around in all directions, he went into the house. Directly he came out and gave a low call, when Boss Strong came out of the woods to the house. They were each armed with two rifles and two or three revolvers. A little after 8 o'clock, when I thought they would be at supper, I slipped up to the house and looked in through the cat-hole in the door, as I supposed they were eating supper by the light on the hearth. A Miss Cummings was there, besides Flora, Andrew's wife. I kept watching until Boss laid down on the floor with his feet to the fire, and his head towards me. He commenced playing on a mouth-harp. Then I saw my chance, and I pushed my rifle (it was a Henry rifle) through the cat-hole until it was not over three feet from his head. I took a steady aim by the light, and shot. When I fired the woman screamed and said "he's shot." "No he isn't"—"yes, he is"—and I looked in as quick as I could get my gun away. Boss' arms and legs had fallen straight from his body, and there was a little movement of the shoulders, as if trying to get up. Andrew Strong was then standing in the shadow of the chimney corner and stayed there until I left. (Note: This was inside the house—the firelight not disclosing him well around the corner, so that he was partially obscured—up in the corner of the room by the fireplace.) This put him out of range and out of bright light. He said to his wife: "Honey, you go out and see what it was," and opened the door opposite the one I was at, and pushed her out; but she did not come around to the side where I was, but went in directly, and said there was nobody about. He sent her out again, telling her to look in the corners and jams (Note: of the chimney). But before she got well out, he said, "Come back, honey, he was blowing on that thing and it busted and blew his head off." And directly after that he said, "My God, he's shot in the head, and it must have come from the cat-hole," and he sent his wife out again. Then I slipped off."

"When I returned the cat-hole was shut up and the house was all dark. I then came back to Shoe Heel, and made up a party and went back to the house of Andrew Strong, arriving there about 10 o'clock, a. m., on Saturday. We found Rhoda Lowry, wife of Henry B. Lowry and sister of Boss and Andrew Strong, wiping up the blood on the floor that had issued from the wound inflicted on Boss Strong. There were several women present, but the body of Boss Strong was nowhere to be found. Upon inquiry, we ascertained from the women present that Steve Lowry and Andrew Strong had just removed the remains of Boss Strong to some secluded spot, and had threatened the women present, that if they watched them to see which way they went, that they would come back and kill them. So, I, and party that accompanied me, returned to Shoe Heel, the same evening, without finding the body of Boss Strong." Upon this statement and other evidence, McQueen collected the reward, but not until the legislature of 1873 had passed an enabling act, so that the State Treasurer could pay the reward upon the proof and without obtaining the dead body. The amount of reward was \$5,000.00.

McQueen was a rather typical Scotchman in build, tall, angular, about six feet six inches tall, deliberate in movement, rather gawky in fact, taciturn, uncommunicative unless in just the right mood, and did not like to talk about himself. He bought a farm between Floral College and Antioch, where he lived several years. While living there the local overseer of public roads accosted him and called attention to the fact that a small

crib just across the road from his front door, was so placed that when one sighted down the farther edge of the road it appeared to be about three or four feet within the right of way, though the road at that point was on level ground and merged with the grove between the road and the house, making a passage way some fifty or seventy-five feet available for any passing vehicles. The road was not so very much traveled and there was no valid reason why this crib should not remain as it was; but the overseer was technically within his rights. McQueen demurred to moving it. Said it had never run over anybody yet. The overseer told him that if he did not move it before the following Thursday when they would be working that road, the road hands at his command would move it.

As the road force came into sight slowly working the road by throwing enough dirt into each hole to cause a bump and make two holes shortly, McQueen took his newspaper and his Henry rifle in his hand, went out into his front porch about 50 yards away from the crib and putting his gun in the corner of the porch, sat down in a chair and began reading his newspaper. Along came the road force slightly ahead of the overseer. When the overseer came up some of the force made a significant nod towards McQueen where he sat reading beside his Henry rifle, with which he had killed Boss Strong. The overseer could not thereafter see that there was a crib anywhere about, and if there was, it certainly did not interfere with the majesty of the law or the dignity of that overseer. The force worked rapidly and quietly and there were no orders to clear that crib from the road. McQueen had said it had never run over anybody yet. When the road force and the overseer were out of hearing distance, there was a good long intaking of breath that had hardly been breathed for the past few minutes.

McQueen made much merriment over the lawlessness of Shoe Heel, now Maxton, and told them in effect that they could bring about a state of law and order if they had the grit to do it. Somebody retorted: If he thinks he can do it so easy why does he not seek the position of chief of police, the office being vacant at the time. McQueen accepted the banter and promised if elected he would do the job. And he was elected.

Not very long thereafter one fine Sunday morning the citizens found on a back lot of one of the stores, a dead Indian. McQueen had been on night duty and was then asleep. It was communion Sunday, and McQueen attended and participated in the communion at the Presbyterian church, the killing a mystery, unsolved and apparently unsolvable. The coroner summoned a jury to meet at 3 o'clock p. m. to view the body and take such further action as seemed proper.

When the time came, the coroner was there and waiting for the chief of police, James Donahoe McQueen, to arrive. Coming up, some one asked him what he thought of the matter and who he supposed could have done it, the man being shot to death. He said yes, he knew who did it. Asked whom, said "I did it." Asked why, he said no Croatan could hit him and live. He said the man was in a nasty temper and followed him after midnight, finally accosting him and struck him, when McQueen shot him. And that was all there was to it. He said when any Croatan, as he called them, hit him he knew it meant one or the other would die and it was not going to be him if he knew himself.

He was ordered held for trial at next term of Superior Court, and every man with a hundred dollars worth of property in the town came forward and offered and even begged to be allowed to sign the bond.

When the trial came off, he was arraigned, tried for murder in the second degree, with the evidence as set out above, almost wholly from McQueen's own lips, and the jury retired to come back almost without sitting down, in fact it is said they did not sit down, and rendered a verdict of "not guilty." The judge holding the court knew nothing or next to nothing more than that he heard in court, and expected a verdict of guilty of course. He was astonished, and as soon as he could regain speech he lost his dignity and began tearing into the county that could do a thing like that. Colonel N. A. McLean, tall, suave, debonair, arose, and asked if he might say just one word at that juncture, that he believed he could enlighten the court a little on that subject. Being granted the permission, he struck out and in a few well chosen words drew a picture of the times between 1864 and 1874, and the heroic part James Donahoe McQueen played in it, and what effect this action had then, and how the turbulent element had subsided in and about Shoe Heel since this occurrence, and closed with a statement like this:

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