

THE "TIMES" PRIZE-WINNING COLUMN

From
ALMAR FARM
In Transylvania
BY CAL CARPENTER

Mrs. Ashworth, whom I wrote about last week, has many stories to tell about Brevard. Many, like the incidents I related last week, are from her own remembrances of 81 years; many more are those she heard second-hand from older friends and her parents.

She remembers them all well and relates them clearly for the entertainment of history lovers like myself who are fortunate enough to share an hour and a cup of coffee with her and her daughter, Eleanor, at their home on Probart Street.

A story Mrs. Ashworth is particularly fond of, she says she heard from Felix Martin, a dear friend some 20 years older than she, whom she calls "Mr. Felix."

"Mr. Felix," she says, "told a story of the days shortly after the Civil War when Brevard, like all the South, was beset by carpetbaggers.

"The people here called them Hoodlums," says Mrs. Ashworth. And that seems to be indicative of the characters of the unprincipled opportunists who came to this backwoods country.

Anyway, there was so much trouble with people of this kind who had flocked into the area after the war, that the men in Transylvania had gotten together and formed a group they called a "Home Guard."

This must have been a somewhat illegal organization, for at this bitter time, during the so-called "Reconstruction," most legal government was in the hands of northerners who had come to the south to grab whatever they could from the defeated southerners. I'm sure the powers-that-were would not have condoned any organization to protect the people of Transylvania from the excesses of those same powers. So we can assume the Home Guard was a clandestine organization that protected its neighbors in much the same manner of the better known Ku Klux Klan.

The members of the Home Guard, because they had to be supported furtively, had almost nothing—evidently not even enough to eat. They met and used as a headquarters, it seems, Brevard's well-known Red House, an old trading post even then of some age; for it was the second house to be built near the intersection of the Asheville-Cherryfield turnpike and the Southeast turnpike through Jones Gap, at the site that was to become the town of Brevard.

The group was half starved at the time of the story we're telling, and it seems that one day in desperation, a few of the men went out and stole a pig. They killed it and cleaned it and brought it back to the Red House where it was roasted for dinner.

Now, it seems that in the membership of the Home

Guard, there was a preacher — whether properly ordained or self-appointed, the story doesn't say. But anyway, this goodly man did not feel he could eat the stolen meat and told his fellow guardsmen so. We can imagine him firmly saying: "Boys, the Book says not to steal. I won't touch a bite of that pig!"

But his strict conscience didn't bother the rest of the hungry guardsmen. Came mess time, the roast pig was passed around the table. The preacher let it go by, although he was as hungry as the rest.

He sat with his mouth watering and his eyes moist while his hungry fellows attacked the succulent pork. The wonderful smell of the roast meat and the sounds of his fellows' enjoyment must have just about driven him crazy.

He stood it as long as he could. Then, the spirit might still have been strong, but the flesh proved weak:

"Boys," he said plaintively, "I believe I will have a little of the gravy!"

Another insight of the harsh days following the Civil War is seen in a story told Mrs. Ashworth by her mother.

On the site where the First Union Bank now stands, there was a saloon operated by a man named Farmer. It was a rough place, a hangout for the "Hoodlums." Across the street, where the Rice Furniture store is now, Mrs. Ashworth's mother had a millinery shop.

It seems that the Hoodlums had it in for "Judge" Southern, as Mrs. Ashworth's father was called, and he was sent the "letter edged in black" telling him to get out of town or be killed. One afternoon shortly after, he and his wife watched across the street while the Hoodlums gathered at the saloon, knowing they were to be raided that night.

But Judge Southern didn't plan to be run out, so he went up the street to buy some buckshot for his shotgun. Fortunately, as Mrs. Ashworth says, he could only find birdshot—much finer lead pellets—and this, no doubt, kept him from killing a man.

For when the Hoodlums showed up at the Southern home that night, Judge Southern treated the first one he could get a bead on to a load of birdshot. That broke up the raid and Mr. Southern was told the next day by the local doctor, that he, the doctor, had been called out of his bed in the middle of the night to pick numerous birdshot out of the backside of a local Hoodlum. If it had been buckshot it would have killed him.

But the word had been passed, according to the doctor: "Don't go messing around that feller Southern. He shoots almighty straight!"

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