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REELFOOT LAKE

Story of How the Lake was Formed by Earthquake—Capitalists try to Take Land From the Fishermen and Bring on a Little War

No tale extant offers more interest to the amateur in sensation than the story of the Night Rider outrages in the Reelfoot Lake district in the Northwest corner of Tennessee. In the past eight months at least seventy crimes, including the whipping of individuals and the destruction of property, have been perpetrated in the Reelfoot Lake district by an organized gang of terrorists, and hundreds of law-abiding citizens have been so crowded and bullied that even now, with the armed forces at the state in control of the situation, they scarcely dare tell all they know. The murder of Captain Quentin Rankin, an attorney of Trenton, in Gibson County, called the sudden attention of the whole country to conditions in the lake district, and aroused the state and local authorities to action.

The physical history of Reelfoot Lake is not without a certain interest of its own; and in order to gain some insight into the series of Night Rider outrages that have been perpetrated in the country round about it is absolutely necessary to look at some points in the amazingly complicated mass of litigation of which it has been the subject. The lake came into existence as the result of a series of earthquakes which began in December, 1811, and continued until June, 1812. It is sixteen to eighteen miles long, very irregular in shape, and covers from thirty-five thousand to forty thousand acres of land.

The majority of the fishers and farmers who live near the lake claim that it is not susceptible of exclusive ownership; the West Tennessee Land Company, to which Captain Rankin belonged was formed in October, 1907 and is the first claimant, individual or corporate to sole ownership and control, whose title has ever been confirmed by the courts. Land was not valuable in the days when Reelfoot came into existence. The hunters and fishers who took up their abode on the banks of the newly created lake regarded it as public property, as one regards a river. Whether or not they knew the land at the bottom of the lake belonged by right to anyone else, they never gave the questions of its ownership a second thought. As time went on and the settlers and their children remained unmolested in their hunting and fishing occupations, the idea never occurred to them that anyone would ever claim exclusive ownership of the lake itself. Their descendants still take the view that the lake is as much public property as the Mississippi river.

It was until comparatively recent times that any serious pretensions to exclusive ownership and control of the lake itself were put forward. Such claims were made by Mr. W. M. Wilson, a citizen of Obion County, who had acquired the original Tennessee grants. He sold these grants to James C. Harris, a wealthy citizen of Tiptonville, who already owned large tracts bordering on both shores of Reelfoot. Harris, now claiming exclusive ownership as Wilson had done, proposed to cut a canal from the southern end of the

lake to the Mississippi river, and drain the inundated district. The fishermen and hunters, and the farmers in the hills behind who are occasional fishers and hunters, resisted. The fishermen saw their occupation gone, if the lake was drained; the farmers farther inland, many of whom held their land by right of occupation, saw that the validity of the titles of the land upon which they lived was more or less involved along with the titles of the land at the bottom of the lake; if Harris had such exclusive control of the lake that he could do what he pleased with it then it followed that he must also own the rest of the land, not inundated, covered by the same original grants. They made common cause against Mr. Harris in the courts.

Mr. Harris then brought the original Doherty claims granted by the state of North Carolina in 1784. This time evidently, he was quite certain of his rights to exclusive control, for he again brought suit to prevent the Reelfoot fishermen and hunters from fishing and hunting in the lake without his consent. In 1905, before the litigation which ensued was settled, Harris died. Judge Harris, his son, of Tiptonville, succeeded to his father's interests. "Judge" is not a title, but is one of the most striking figures in the lake district, indeed he is, to my mind, the most interesting person in all that country. His life has been threatened not once but dozens of times.

He lives at Tiptonville, in Lake County, in a house that has any feudal baron's castle that ever was, quite beaten as a defensive stronghold, for the ground round about it is planted with mines, and, by merely touching a button as he sits within, Judge Harris could hurl an army to destruction.

The Harris claims, acquired by successive purchases, in 1905, covered the bottom of the lake and about 90 per cent of the land along its shores.

In October, 1907, the West Tennessee Land and Improvement Company was formed. Besides Judge Harris, those interested were J. R. Deason, Captain Quentin Rankin, Robert Z. Taylor, all lawyers living at Trenton, in Gibson County; Seid Waddell, a lawyer of Union City; Walter Pleasant, of Union City; a fisherman, and John Shaw, of Samburg, a fisherman.

All the lawyers in this corporation had at one time or another represented the fishermen in the courts in their fights against the Harris, father and son. They discovered that there were certain tracts of land along the lake which lay in the shape of small wedges between the various tracts owned by Harris; they acquired these tracts and formed a partnership with Harris; the organization being known as the West Tennessee Land and Improvement Company.

This deal is variously represented in the lake country. Rankin, Taylor, Deason, Waddell, Pleasant, Shaw and Burdick (who was never a member of the West Tennessee Land Company) claimed that it was a compromise for the purpose of settling the difficulties between Harris

and the fishermen.

Some of the fishermen but not all of them, claim that it was a desertion of their interests on the part of the lawyers concerned. Of these lawyers, Captain Rankin is murdered; Colonel Taylor's murder was attempted; Waddell and Deason have both been the recipients of numerous threatening letters and warnings from Night Riders.

The right to fish for profit in the lake is leased from the land company by two principal concerns. One of these is the Reelfoot Fish Company, consisting of Burdick, Shaw and Pleasant, operating at Samburg. The other is P. C. Ward, who runs the hotel at Walnut Log, from which Rankin was taken to his death. Burdick was never a member of the West Tennessee Land Company; Shaw and Pleasant soon disposed of their interests and withdrew from it.

Ward, and the Reelfoot Fish Company, the chief parties authorized by the West Tennessee Land Company to fish for profit in the lake, but the fish brought to them by the working fishermen, reselling them in a general way; the fishermen are allowed to take all they choose for their own use, as is anyone else, but may not sell their catch to anyone except the Burdick or Ward, for this privilege they pay the West Tennessee Land Company one-half cent per pound royalty on all fish handled by them. The gross business done on the lake amounts to nearly \$50,000 a year.

It is a well known fact that the lake is controlled by a certain coterie of the fishermen. And his life has been threatened by Night Riders.

Let me repeat—The fishermen are not all Night Riders; the Night Riders are not all fishermen; the point of the lake's control is not the sole inspiration of all the night-riding.

The first Night Rider activity manifested itself early in April, about three weeks after the refusal of Judge Cooper to dissolve the injunction restraining the fishermen who desired to compete with Ward and Burdick. They took the form anonymous letters threatening the lives of Colonel Taylor, Captain Rankin, Dr. Deason, Mr. Waddell, Mr. Walter Pleasant, Mr. John Shaw, Judge Cooper, Mr. Burdick and Mr. Judge Harris.

Immediately after the death of Captain Rankin five companies of Tennessee State troops under the command of Colonel W. C. Tatum, of Nashville, were hurried into the Reelfoot district; the sheriffs of Obion, Lake and Dyer Counties formed strong posses and assisted them; and Judge Joseph E. Jones, of the fourteenth Tennessee circuit convened the grand jury in special session. Governor Malcolm R. Patterson at the time engaged in a campaign for re-election, concealed all his speaking engagements and went to take personal charge of the situation. He offered a reward of \$10,000—the largest the law allowed—for the capture of the murderers. Martial law was not declared, but it was put into effect, and in a week a hundred prisoners were in camp established at Samburg.

The trials will be watched with unusual interest, and there will be a great deal of disappointment if some legal hangings do not follow.—Don Marquis, in Uncle Remus's—The Home Magazine for December.

Brushes, scratches, sores and burns that other things have failed to cure will heal quickly and completely when you use DeWitt's Carbolic Witch Hazel Salve. It is especially good for piles. Sold by J. H. Gwyn.

A COUNTY WHERE 2,000 FARMERS HAVE TELEPHONES.

How the Phones Were Secured and How They Add to the Convenience Safety and Prosperity of Their Owners.

Messrs Editors: Union County has, perhaps, the best rural telephone service that can be found in any county in the South. We have thirty telephone exchanges in the county, twenty-six of which are in the rural districts. There are approximately two thousand telephones in the homes of farmers of Union County. The service is not confined to land-owners. Many of our renters own their 'phones and enjoy this convenience along with their more prosperous neighbors.

I note with interest the article in last week's Progressive Farmer telling of the convenience of telephone communication. While you mentioned the principle conveniences, it is impossible for even those who have the service to enumerate the many ways a 'phone is brought into use in a rural community where a complete telephone system has developed.

ONE FARMER'S PHONE SAVED HIM \$150.

In this county it would be a reminder of "past ages" to see a man "going after the doctor." If the service of a doctor is needed by a negro family, or by one who has no 'phone in the house, he steps out to the nearest 'phone and the doctor is called. When a mole strays or his cow gets out, the 'phone is used to locate them. When prices are fluctuating the 'phone is brought into use to keep in close touch with the market. About two years ago one farmer in this county saved \$150 on his cotton crop by selling his cotton by 'phone, when it reached the highest point. When the farmer leaves for town with his chickens and eggs and country produce he knows what he is going to get for them. News of a sensational nature gets out among rural 'phone owners before a daily paper can put it in type. When McKinley was shot farmers in Union County knew it within an hour after it occurred. And the social feature alone is worth many times its cost. When the faithful wife grows weary with the monotonous work in the home, it is an agreeable diversion to call up a neighbor for a few minutes' social conversation. It rests her and makes her task seem lighter. The uses made of the 'phone by girls and boys of courting age can be imagined better than described. But this is merely incidental.

INDIVIDUAL EXCHANGES AND CO-OPERATIVE TINES.

You want to know how we organized the rural system? Every telephone exchange in this county, with possibly one exception, is an independent exchange, owned by an individual, or individuals, as an investment. We have no co-operative exchanges, but we have hundreds of rural lines that were built on the cooperative plan. For instance, a farmer living eight miles from town buys a switchboard and puts it in a room of his residence. He then runs a line to town and connects with the town exchange (free, on exchange basis). He then next proposes to give his neighbors telephone service at 50 or 75 cents a month, if they will build their own lines to his switchboard and buy their own 'phones. When several farmers along a road go to work and build a cooperative line, divid-

ing the expense equally. We describe our system correctly, then when we say that our exchanges are established by individuals for profit, while the rural lines are built in a co-operating way for the service of those who build them. In this way there is no company to organize, unless you call the farmers who go in together and build a party line a company.

The system develops slowly. Farmers are conservative and they generally want plenty of time for mature consideration before going into anything new; but if there is a switchboard put down in a community, the telephone fever will spread all right and the investment will be safe if made in an intelligent, progressive vicinity.

CITY CONVENIENCE AND COUNTRY FREEDOM.

This modern system of quick communication is so valuable, and yet so cheap, that it is astonishing that farmers will do without it. There is absolutely no reason why we should not avail ourselves of this opportunity to remove the isolation of country life and bring ourselves in touch with the commercial world. With the development of rural mail delivery the rural telephone system and the special tax for rural high schools, farmers can have the conveniences of city life, and at the same time enjoy the freedom of country life.—J. Z. Green, Union Co., N. C. in Progressive Farmer.

PROGRAM PASTORS, LAY-LEADERS DISTRICT STEWARDS MEETING.

Elkin, N. C. Dec. 29, 30, 1908
Tuesday 29th:
2 P. M. Opening and organization.
3 P. M. Where and why we succeed and where and why we failed last year, Rev. W. M. Bagby.
3:30 P. M. A forward movement for 1909, E. H. Koehntzky.
4 P. M. The work of the District Evangelist, Rev. Z. Paris.
4:30 P. M. District stewards meeting.
7 P. M. Financial Systems. Discussion opened by E. H. Koehntzky.
Wednesday 30:
9 Full collections and how Rev. D. M. Litaker.
9:30 Soul winning Rev. Z. E. Barnhardt and W. L. Dawson.
10 How to reach unoccupied Territory, Discussion opened by Rev. T. J. Houck.
11 The pastor and his work Rev. D. V. Price.
11:30 Closing words from the Presiding Elder.
Please notify Rev. D. L. Litaker when you will arrive at Elkin.

Good Cough Medicine for Children.

The Season for coughs and colds is now at hand and too much care cannot be used to protect the children. A child is much more likely to contract diphtheria or scarlet fever when he has a cold. The quicker you cure his cold the less the risk. Chamberlain's Cough Remedy is the sole reliance of many mothers, and few of those who have tried it are willing to use any other. Mrs. F. F. Starcher, of Ripley, W. Va., says: "I have never used anything other than Chamberlain's Cough Remedy for my children and it has always given good satisfaction." This remedy contains no opium or other narcotic and may be given as confidently to a child as to an adult. For sale by Gwyn Drug Co.

Will Southern Get Elkin and Alleghany.

Winston-Salem, N. C. Dec. 16.—It is thought here that the new railroad from Elkin to Sparta will soon be in the hands of the Southern Railway Company. At least indications point this way.

Sixth Vice-President H. B. Spencer and Chief Engineer Mills, of the Southern, passed through Winston-Salem yesterday en route to Elkin, and beginning yesterday are inspecting the work already done and going over and proposed line to Sparta. The visit of these officials has led to the rumor that the Southern may even complete the construction of the line, but there is little or no probability of that since the work of building the line is progressing satisfactorily and there is no likelihood of the present company being embarrassed for the lack of funds. Besides the state is taking a part in building the road, furnishing a force of about 100 convicts for the work, receiving stock in the company as remuneration for the work.

The Elkin and Alleghany Railway Company was organized nearly two years ago. Hugh G. Chatham, of Elkin, more recently of this city, was the moving spirit in the enterprise, as he has been in many others for the industrial upbuilding of this section, and he was elected president. H. E. Fries and A. H. Eller, of this city are among the directors.

The road, as surveyed, will extend from Elkin, in Surry county, to Sparta, in Alleghany county, a distance of about forty miles, directly across and over the Blue Ridge. The grading, after about a year's work, now extends to the foot of the Ridge, and the rails will be laid for this distance in a very short while and the first span about fifteen miles of the line, which extends through some rich virgin forests and timber lands, will be placed in profitable operation.

When this is completed the line will be extended southeastwardly through Yadkin county to this city, a distance of about forty miles, making a total length of eighty miles.

It has been estimated that the line between Elkin and Sparta will be completed during 1910, opening up a fine country, rich in natural resources, and giving the first line in this section over the Blue Ridge, with the effect that the trade of that section will be attracted to Winston-Salem, instead of continuing to go to Virginia towns on the other side of the Ridge.

The leasing of the line by the Southern, which is practically assured, probably means that the first span will be put in operation in the very near future and that the entire road will probably be finished much earlier than had been anticipated.

NOTICE.

This is to notify the public that the firm of Simpson and Marion doing business in Surry county North Carolina has been dissolved by mutual consent and that the business is now conducted by R. L. Simpson, Nov. 14 1908
R. L. Simpson.
R. H. Marion.

100 PIGS.

One hundred fine pigs on hand. Order before they are picked over.

JOHN A. YOUNG
Greensboro