

Highlands Man, 95, Has Had Dangerous, Colorful Career

One of the most interesting and colorful characters in Macon county is John H. Durgin, who recently celebrated his 95th birthday at his home in Highlands.

Mr. Durgin is one of the first settlers of Highlands, having moved there in 1883 from West Roxbury, Mass. He moved to Highlands in search of health, and was only expected to live for a few weeks, but is still hale and hearty at 95.

From 1866 to 1871 Mr. Durgin was with General Custer and took part in the Indian campaigns directed by that daring and headlong leader. He says that Custer always wore buckskins when in the field against the Indians and that they were "all right when they were dry but darned tight when they got wet." "Custer would do anything or go anywhere for the sake of a fight with the redskins, and was always losing his gun when on the run," said Mr. Durgin.

As a member of H troop under Captain F. W. Bentine, Mr. Durgin was sent with one squadron to guard the line of the Union Pacific Smoky Hill route, which was then under construction from Fort Harker to Fort Wallace.

John Durgin, because of his ability to ride a horse at a mad gallop for three-quarters of a day and be ready for a like ride on the next day, was given the post of dispatch rider, personal courier for Custer.

Called "Reckless Jack"

There was probably no more dangerous job among the Indian fighters and Durgin, miraculously, came through without a scratch, winning the name, "Reckless Jack." There were plenty of "nearly's" and the old courier told of one of these:

"Three of us had been sent out once with the same message because Custer figured one might possibly get through. We were to ride together across the brush country of Montana for the first day and then separate and go by three different routes to the same fort.

"No one believed there could be any danger that first day, but we had only been out a few hours when a small band of hostile Indians loped over the hills on their shaggy ponies. Our orders had been not to fight unless we were absolutely driven to it, so we dug spurs into our mounts and flew over the country.

"The Indians fired on us and then settled down to the pursuit. One lucky shot struck the courier who was riding on the left. We heard him groan and shifted quickly so that one of us rode on either side of him.

Threw Wounded Man Away

"Can you hang on a while?" I asked him.

"He set his lips grimly and nodded, for he knew what would happen if we stopped long enough to dress his wound. He was losing blood fast and after an hour's riding, he cried out that he couldn't go on, for us to leave him. Then he slumped in his saddle. We caught him just in time.

"Burdened with him as we were we knew that the Indians would soon catch up to us and even though the band was small we dared not stop. The message had to be taken through. We thought about it for a while and then conceived a plan.

"The country there is rolling and uneven. A sudden slope will hide you completely from anyone behind and the slopes were covered with thick, tall brush. We galloped down one of these slopes and just as we came to the thickest part of the brush, the two of us tossed our wounded companion with all our combined strength. He dropped out of sight into the tangled growth.

"Later when we eluded the Indians and went back for him, he said he felt the ground shake as the savages thundered past him. If they had discovered him he would have lost his scalp and his heart, for the Indians always tore a man's heart out in those days."

Learned Redskins Signals

Traipsing over the country as he did, John Durgin learned many of the Indians' secrets that were not only valuable in a military way, but often were a means of saving his own skin and those of the soldiers with him. Once, for instance, he lay flat on the ground and watched an Indian pow-wow. The savages seemed to be deciding on some code or signals that were to be made

with a piece of glass and the sun's reflection. A brave waved the glittering glass back and forth and then there was a discussion, then the brave waved it in wide circles.

Durgin racked his brain for a long time and then was struck by a bright idea.

"When Custer and the rest of us started out on our march, we knew the Indians were following us. Through the thickets we could see them occasionally and guessed that they were expecting other warriors to join them at some point along the way.

Foiled the Enemy

"I rode in the rear guard, watching the redskins as much as possible. Suddenly I saw the piece of glass flash in a circle several times. Riding up to Custer I told him what I had seen and what I thought it was.

"The circle means that they will attempt to surround us," I ventured, "and the straight line means they intend to close in on us." General Custer immediately agreed that the signals could have no other meaning and by watching the signaler we were able to keep just out of the reach of our enemies until we joined a force large enough to face them."

The final adventure that he told about was one of those peculiar happenings that a man meets only once in a lifetime. John Durgin was out on courier duty riding the trackless Indian country post haste. Once during the day he had seen an Indian trailing him and then the savage had suddenly disappeared.

There was something strange about this and the soldier figured that the Indian had circled with the idea of cutting him off at one of the passes in the hill country.

Shot Through Knothole

Durgin rode on trying to dope out some means of handling the situation, of gaining the surprise end of the meeting himself. Ahead of him, some miles away, was a deserted shelter, a sort of temporary fort that had been thrown up during a prolonged halt in one of the earlier campaigns.

Durgin made for the shelter, intending to take his lonely meal there where he would be out of sight if anyone chanced to be scanning the countryside from the hills.

He was riding by the shack seeking the southern side, where a rude door had been constructed, when something made him rein in his horse abruptly and draw his body back as if to dodge a missile. It was an instinct rather than a sense perception that made him do it.

At that instant he heard the reports of a rifle and the wicked whine of bullets flying close under his chin.

Durgin was off his horse in the twinkling of an eye, his gun in his hand ready for action. In far less time than it takes to tell it he saw a tiny curl of smoke floating up from a knothole in the walls of the frail fort. Swiftly he leaped toward the hole, thrust the muzzle of his revolver against it and pulled the trigger.

A startled cry within and then the thud of a falling body told him that he had got his man. Cautiously stepping inside the structure he saw the Indian, the same one who had been trailing him all the morning, lying dead on the ground.

In the winter of '67 Custer moved the headquarters of the regiment to Fort Leavenworth and Mr. Durgin's troop was stationed at Fort Hays with Lieutenant Hale in command. With this troop he scouted all summer until a treaty was made with the Cheyennes and Arapahoes.

Mr. Durgin Continues Story

"After that," Mr. Durgin related, "the Cheyennes made a raid on the Salina and captured a lot of stock and three white women. We got the stock but did not get the women until the winter of '68.

"After being in the saddle two weeks we struck the Indians on the Wichita in winter quarters and surrounded the camp during the night. Orders were to charge when the morning star rose. Captain Bentine with our troop was to charge. After we fired we heard General Custer's band and his yell, and then we had a running fight from daylight until noon. We were on the skirmish line from 12 until about 3, and then couldn't keep awake. Then the Osages (our scouts) shot several hundred ponies

She's the Sweetheart of Sigma Chi



Much to the discomfiture of 300 freshman women and the delight of several thousand spectators, members of Sigma Chi fraternity at the University of California became "Indians" for a day and helped initiate the first-year women. Finally they carried off Jane Jackson in their dry-land canoe to be the "sweetheart of Sigma Chi." Miss Jackson seemed to view the honor dubiously.

Firemen Block Attempted Suicide



Like the late John Warde, who killed himself last July in a sensational leap from a Manhattan hotel, William Ahearn, a psychopathic patient in New York's Bellevue hospital, stood on a narrow ledge of the hospital's ninth floor for several hours before Fireman Thomas J. K... (left) gripped him by the ankle and dragged him back to safety. The incident attracted a large crowd.

and we moved on the back trail for four or five miles and went into camp. The Osages acted as pickets and guards while we got some sleep. They told us in the morning that the Cheyennes had surrounded us in the night, intending to surprise us in the morning, but found us too wide awake. We broke camp in the morning and established a post at Fort Sill.

"We stayed two months in these winter quarters and then got word where the white women were who had been taken in the fall. Orders came from Custer for 300 picked men and horses and we started on the trail. We crossed the Red river into Texas where we came up to the Indians, again, and Custer gave orders to fire into them. He then countermanded the order and we charged into them bringing out three chiefs, Dull Knife, Artillery Jack, and I have forgotten the other. He then sent word to the Indians to bring out the white women or the chiefs would be hanged. They waited until almost sundown before they sent the women. They wanted their chiefs back, but Custer told them they must come and fight for them if they wanted them.

"Meanwhile our rations for men and horses had played out, except for starved mule meat. We then recrossed the river to Fort Sill where we put in the balance of the winter, and Custer issued double rations for all. In the spring we struck for Fort Hays and headquarters at Fort Leavenworth and had fresh mounts issued. In the spring of '71 we were relieved from the western department and H troop was stationed at Nashville, Tenn., where I received my discharge from duty."

Mr. Durgin had been out of the

army for five years when the campaign against the Sioux Indians occurred and General Custer was killed and his command wiped out at the Battle of the Little Big Horn in Montana, on June 26, 1876.

State College Answers Timely Farm Questions

Question—What is the earliest date that cabbage seed can be sown for best results?

Answer—Cabbage seed may be sown in an outdoor bed for the early spring crop as early as October 1 in the tidewater and lower coastal plain section. For the upper coastal plain and lower piedmont section the earliest date is September 16. For the western part of the state, seeds are usually sown in coldframes during January. In eastern and central North Carolina the frost-proof Jersey Wakefield and Charleston Wakefield varieties are the best.

Question—How much light should I plan for my poultry laying house?

Answer—Two forty-watt lamps should be provided for each 400 square feet of floor space. These bulbs should be placed in the center of the house ten feet apart and six feet from the floor. To prevent a waste of light, a reflector sixteen inches in diameter and four inches deep should be used with each light bulb. If all-night lights are used then a dim light with a reflector is best with two 10 or 15 watt bulbs being sufficient for a house 20 by 20. Where other than all night lighting is used the lights should be regulated so that the birds have from 12 to 14 hours a day for feeding.

Question—When should paradi-

chlorobenene be applied to peach trees to control borers?

Answer—The treatment should be applied about the first of October in Western Carolina and about the middle of October in the eastern section. The crystals should be applied in a continuous band about an inch in width and care should be taken that the chemical should not be closer than one and one-half inches from the tree trunk. Smooth the surface about a foot from the tree before applying the crystals. Several shovels of dirt should be placed on the ring in the form of a mound and packed down with a shovel. One-fourth to one-half ounce should be used for trees four to six years of age and one ounce for trees six years old or older.

Wheel Trays Praised As Aid To Housewife

One of the most convenient things a housewife can have for the dining room and kitchen is a tea wagon, or wheel tray, said Miss Mamie N. Whisnant, State college assistant extension specialist in home management and house furnishings.

These wagons, which can be made at home or purchased for a moderate sum, not only save steps but also enable the hostess to serve more graciously, Miss Whisnant pointed out.

Carrying food into the dining room and taking empty dishes back to the kitchen is much easier with a tea wagon. Housewives also find it nice to have the coffee or tea service placed on a wheel tray beside the hostess rather than on the dining table.

As dishes are emptied during the course of a meal, they may be set on the bottom shelf of the wagon where they will be out of sight until they are rolled into the kitchen.

Another advantage, Miss Whisnant said, is that an entire course, such as soup or the dessert, may be brought in and served at once instead of being brought in from the kitchen one dish at a time.

At a meeting of home demonstration club women at Trenton in the Jones County agricultural building a few days ago, Miss Whisnant demonstrated the use of a tea wagon, and practically all women present announced that they wanted to get wagons for themselves.

Directions for making wheel trays at home may be obtained free from the home demonstration department at State college, Raleigh, in home management circular No. 5. Or knocked-down wagons, complete with all equipment and full directions for assembling, can be bought inexpensively, Miss Whisnant added.

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