

HAPPY HOLLOW LADIES' PIPE SMOKING CONTEST

Women of 1837 Outstripped Records of Modern Puffers of Fags

(By John W. Edwards)

It was in the early fall of 1837, when the smoky days of Indian Summer were at their best, that the ladies of Happy Hollow decided to have a smoking contest. Years ago there were no Camels, Chesterfields or Lucky Strike cigarettes, only good old honest home-made pipe tobacco and self rolled cigar tobacco. Girls were not in the habit of smoking "fags," but the older women quite often pulled the cool sweet smoke into their mouths, from pipes, surrounded with rosy lips of nautre's coloring and not out of the ten cent stores; and then send it back making rings and ringlets that Bud Fisher can never equal in his "Mutt and Jeff" strips.

The summer work was completed, all the farm was in fine shape, so the good people gathered at the home of Bill and Mrs. Willie Bell for the smoking contest.

Bill, a tall handsome man with blue eyes, and a black mustache, which helped hide his always smiling lips, had only recently married Miss Willie Brown, a red headed, freckled faced, will talking girl of one hundred and fifty avoirdupois. They were a congenial couple as only a short marriage voyage hadn't had time to make them a fighting brigade.

The newly built log house was pleasing to the eye. Sitting upon a little knoll, with majestic oaks, not planted but left standing in the clearing, acting as shade trees. The walls of the house were of neatly hewed logs, daubed with terra cotta colored clay, two stories in height, with a massive rock chimney built on the north side; a low roofed porch on the front, with a smaller one on the rear, made a worthy foundation for the clean, greyish tinted board roof.

After dinner had been served and the dishes cleared away the crowd gathered in the large sitting room, which served as parlor, bed room and living room.

To name the party and try to give a mental picture of each would not only be a burden but a boredom. There were fifteen women, wives of fifteen men, present together with their husbands and seven babies.

Bill was appointed referee and general ring master. Each woman had come prepared with a large clay pipe, using a cane some twelve inches in length for a stem. The men were to furnish the tobacco. Each woman was to smoke tobacco furnished in baskets, which would hold about a gallon, the one smoking the most tobacco was to be the winner.

Bill lined the contestants up in a row; the rules called for a standing on both feet throughout the contest. Then he placed a long bench, made from half a log, with holes bored at each end for the legs to be placed in. This bench was for the service of the ladies to place their baskets of tobacco upon. After passing around long pine splinters, which were to be used as matches, he placed five lighted candles upon the bench, so the ladies could light their pine fighters. When all of these preparations were completed, Bill warned the pipe smoking females to prepare for the great race, for he was about

ready to fire the starters' gun. So putting words to actions, Bill caught up a rifle from a corner of the room, and placing the barrel out of a window, he fired.

All the ladies rushed to their baskets and began filling their pipes with great "wads" of home spun.

Without looking towards the racers, Bill decided he had made a big mistake, for as the smoke of the burnt powder wafted upwards he saw a team, belonging to one of the neighbors, break free from the tree where they had been tethered.

"Boys! there is a great calamity outside, for neighbor Jones' team has been freed from their landing. I see since this gun is not mine, instead of a harmless discharge of powder there was a bullet set free, and I shot the hitching rope in-two.

The men rushed for the door in time to see the team go galloping down the rock road. But not a sign of excitement did the smokers show, for in less than a minute fifteen pipes were going, with great wreathes of smoke circling towards the ceiling; another sixty seconds and the room took on an atmosphere of a smoke house, when hot weather comes after the "fresh meat" is just killed.

After a short chase the run-a-ways were recaptured and the men "piled" into the wagon and rode back towards the house on the knoll. When they came in sight of the house, smoke was issuing from the chimney in a solid column and from the windows in clouds and occasionally a puff formed an outlet through some small crevice or crack in the walls.

"Men! hurry up, the house is on fire," shouted Bill.

So tying the team to a tree the men rushed toward the house and the rain barrel was soon emptied into large wooden buckets, which the men carried as they rushed into the house. But for all their pains not a blaze could be found, only a steady glow from thirteen pipes. On the floor they discovered two of the contestants lying in a swoon, the tobacco had gone to their heads and the smoke of the room had quickly placed a knock-out blow. They carried the unconscious ones into an adjoining room and while some of the men worked with water and fans, Bill and the others reentered the living room.

The race was progressing nicely. The thirteen had no knowledge of the disaster, which had hit two of their numbers. Oh No! they were too much occupied with their own affairs.

Bill had to re-plenish two of the baskets and make a note on the scoring tablet.

The race had been going for forty-five minutes, with two ladies gone to the showers; two leading the field field-shoulder to shoulder, while eleven others trailed behind.

"Water! water!" pleaded one of the leaders. Then Bill appointed Ransom Brown to act as water-jack. When Ransom carried the bucket of sparkling water into the room and handed a gourd full of the cooling liquid to the lady, she didn't drink, but only tried to cool her parched tongue.

Without any great ado, three others of the smokers quietly sank towards the floor. They were carried out and the race only as the minutes crept on, slowed down.

As one-third of the field was out of the race, Bill with a piece of charcoal made a large number on the floor behind each of the contestants. By using this system he could keep the score easier.

In an adjoining room a great commotion arose; seven babies gave forth heart breaking appeals, for their mothers, but mothers in every instance were too busy to take off time.

Seven men then had a job on hand carrying babies. They lined up and went marching around the room like some standing army. In other words they were, for if a man tried to take a seat and ease his feet, the babe with no respect for corns or bunions would begin to weep and then scream.

In the living room were tired feet also. Some of the ladies would try to place a foot upon the bench to rest, but Bill would get out his rules and read section number two and poor foot would be placed upon the floor again.

Seventy minutes saw the two leading ladies retired from the race, for smoking too fast had completely burned their tongues to a crispy, burn-

ing, stinging piece of word throwing machinery.

The men were getting worried and worn out. For the waiting on babies and working over swooned, sick women folks were very tiresome.

A Mr. Jones, braver than the other men, after getting the attention of the ladies still in the race, proposed to call it a tie between the eight women and divide the fifteen dollars equally. But all he got for his proposal was a crack over the head with an umbrella and a cloud of smoke blown into his face by the angry women.

His wife stopped smoking long enough to remark, "We ladies will be here for two weeks or have an honest winner of first prize."

Ninety minutes passed and another lady lost the prize by fainting. But the strange part; the seven men who had to hold babes were still on the job, yet holding a baby was no more of a job than holding a sick woman. What were they to do when they had both to do?

Poor Bill had his hands full now, for when the last lady went to the showers here husband had been holding Bill's baby, so now he had to refill the baskets with tobacco, keep score and call the results, also act in the nursery. But he was a man who met every crisis with a smile. He tied the cooing youngster upon his shoulder like the squaws carry their off-spring.

No. 7, being Bill's wife called for the fourth basket of Burley Leaf, and that cleaned the tobacco nearly to a finish. So the men had a conference in the yard. Something had to be done for the seven who were still in the race had closed most of the gaps, and were running almost neck to neck. In a few minutes six other baskets of tobacco had to be on hand.

Mr. Jones again came forward with a suggestion. "Gentlemen, this contest is growing lengthy, and quite expensive. We men will face a tobacco famine if it lasts another hour. Why can't we bring it to a close?"

"Go ahead," urged fourteen tired voices.

"Well here is my plan: We will put some mullen and red pepper in the rest of the tobacco."

"Say, I won't stand for foul play," angrily spoke up Bill, "and besides my wife would be the winner for I just gave her the fourth basket and the other ladies will have to be supplied shortly."

Poor Bill was over ruled to a man, when a Mr. Kilpatrick made a short talk: "Gentlemen, we care not who wins the prize, foul or fair. The shadows of night are fast approaching. Most of us have far to go, good tobacco is being wasted and I am getting good and tired bathing and fanning Jennie."

So putting the plans into effect, some of the men crept out behind the barn to the garden to gather some pepper pods, while others hurried towards a hill in the pasture and plucked some mullen leaves. Then gathering at the barn where Bill had some tobacco hanging in his barn loft, they fixed up the mixture, which they named "Red Hot Mamma."

Mr. Jones had to make an announcement when the men re-entered to the house: "Ladies, we have run out of Burley Leaf tobacco and Neighbor Bill has placed to our disposal some of the new tobacco he ordered last spring. It will bite the tongue by changing the brand, but it is the best we can do."

The ladies agreed it would be all O. K. with them. Three baskets were empty, so as Bill began to refill the other men left the room with winks and smiles. The first to get a puff of the new mixture let out a yell and rushed towards the water bucket, spitting and foaming. The next two started together and they rushed from the room shouting, "Fire!"

Bill made a record of every number as they fell out. His record showed with one hundred and fourteen minutes of going only four out of the fifteen remained, the others either swooning or running to the showers. Numbers 9, 6 and 4 asked for their fourth basket at the same time.

The men were peeping in at doors and windows with smiles cured on their lips.

The pine splinter flickered as it went to No. 9's pipe, the same happened to numbers 6 and 4. About three light puffs arose from three lighted pipes and a scream pierced the still smoky atmosphere and with "Fire! fire! we are no fire!" three ladies rushed from the house not

checking their speed until they landed into Cartoogechaye Creek.

The men entered and Bill read: "The Women's Pipe Smoking Contest has come to an end after one hundred and twenty-three minutes of tobacco burning. Mrs. Willie Bell pronounced as winner. It is with pleasure, dear wife, I present you with the fifteen dollars, but don't become vain, for I don't believe you could have smoked the fifth basket."

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And face at last
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The year just past
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—TROY F. HORN.

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(By Edson R. Waite, Shawnee, Okla.)
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