

Wilson's --- Bear Huntin'est Family

By Bill Sharpe
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Pers. N. C. — It has been the Wilsons vs. the bears for well over a hundred years, and it seems to be a tie. The bear-huntin'est family in America, with its traditions going back to Big Tom Wilson himself, is carrying the feud on into the fourth generation; but Ewart Wilson, present overlord of the bear-lands below Mt. Mitchell, admits there are more bears now than there were when his great-grandpappy, Ned Wilson, settled on Cane River. And he's happy about it, because there's nothing a Wilson likes better than to go after a bear.

Big Tom, legendary woodsman of this region, killed 113 of the big brutes in his days. Adolph, his son, counted 112 of them, and then hung up his rifle, determined not to beat the record of his illustrious father, although old Dolph would go on the hunts to "ear" the race. Ewart has over 50 to his credit, and Ewart's son, Ned, last year started his career as a driver and got his first animal.

The bears of the Black Mountains and the Wilsons of the same address, are respectfully acquainted with each other. It is remembered that once Big Tom had two cubs treed, but he was sans gun or dog. The frightened cubs started climbing down the tree, anxious to be elsewhere. Big Tom lit pine torches in an attempt to keep them treed, but they came right on down. Fearful of being disgraced by allowing such an easy haul to get away, Big Tom, yelled.

"Stop!" he roared. "This is Big Tom a-talkin' to ye!"

Whereupon the cubs, having heard that dreadful name from their parents, promptly scampered back up the tree.

The hostilities have been carried on without acrimony or animosity. In spite of his depredations, the big black souther, bear is too highly regarded by the Appalachians to arouse their hatred. He is, to the true mountaineer, the noblest and wisest adversary of the forests and has the same relation to the southern Highlands that the tiger has to India, the lion to Africa, and the buffalo to our plains. He is a worthy, cunning and utterly fascinating quarry. To the Wilsons and their hounds he is a perpetual and personal challenge.

A traveler from Boston (Charles Dudley Warner), who stopped at their home around 1870, describes in his diary how, in listening to Big Tom, the man suddenly seemed familiar, and then he realized he was keeping company with Leatherstocking himself. His fame as a woodsman was already so great as to have turned Warner toward his home, and he admits that "Big Tom himself weighed in the scale more than Mt. Mitchell, and not to see him was to miss one

of the most characteristic productions of the country." Long after he had gone to bed, the traveler heard Tom describe the day's hunt to his son (probably Adolphus). No, he had not glimpsed the bear, but he knew it well. He described in detail its probable weight, sex and disposition; the trail crossed this stream or that, and headed toward a familiar cove or ridge; the bear likely would feed in such a hollow tomorrow, where already plans were made to catch it.

Big Tom was, however, no backwoods bragadoccio. In Asheville, old-timers remember the story of the Southern Society of New York banquet he attended near the end of his life. Orators dwelt at length upon his deeds and qualities, and at last Big Tom was called upon to respond to the tribute.

The old fellow, now with a long white beard, arose and with dignity gave this speech:

"I'm glad I seed you, because if I hadn't seed you I wouldn't of knowed you."

It is slavish work, taking bear in this country, and only the most stout-legged of men attempt it the Wilson way. The country is precipitous—Yancy is the most rugged county in all eastern America — and it is characterized by extensive rhododendron "hells" and laurel "slicks" through which even a lean and determined hound can hardly worm. A man got lost in a Smoky Hell in the last century and it took him nine days to find his way out. But Big Tom would leave home alone with a handful of corn meal, and stay for a week, living off the game, making ponies from the meal and water, caching his kills, and returning with horses later to pick them up.

Today, Ewart, sophisticated by frequent contact with city hunters, establishes his guests on stands, and drives the bears toward them, but when he is on a hunt alone or with his neighbors, they not infrequently chase a bear for two or more days, eating as best they can or not at all. One time, the famished Ewart came upon a deserted camping site and ate the potato peelings he found there. And once on a hot chase, without food all day, he encountered some campers who offered him bacon and bread. Fearful that the chase would get away from him, he did not take time to cook it but stuck the raw bacon between slices of bread and munched it as he ran after the pack.

When Big Tom lived, the hunters came from afar in wagons or on horseback, following a rocky road up the river valley. When the Wilson house overflowed, they camped nearby — sometimes for weeks. Now they come purring up in shiny automobiles — a doctor from Atlanta, a publisher from Asheville, a utility President from Raleigh, and many others. These are

members of the Big Tom Wilson Bear Club which has leased hunting rights on the 13,000-acre boundary from the Wilson heirs. But by tacit agreement, the club cannot deprive the old bear-hunting neighbors of the family from their ancient privileges, and so the civilized outdoorsmen mingle with the Duggins from Avery, and the Plotts from way over in the Smokies, and others.

There is little generalization in the bear talk around the Wilson fireside because the Wilsons firmly believe that in each bear are incarnated individual and sometimes a most human characteristics. There are mean bears and scarily bears. Some are sheep and calf raiders, others are wary of the lowland farms. Then there are bears that will run, and others that will stand and fight; there are dog-killers and timid tree-climbers; and some are wise and some are foolish.

Method of chasing the bears has altered somewhat since the days of Big Tom. Now the hunters drive up the Big Tom Wilson toll road as far as they can, and then are placed on stands along the bed of the old lumber railroad. The drivers start out with the pack in leash, led by a wise old "finder" dog. The finder is almost invariably the dean of the pack, often too old to do any chasing himself, but with a keen nose. The finder gets the trail and gives voice, and the fighting pack takes up the scent.

"After a "starter" dog has found a trail, the rest of the pack is set upon it for the drive. The smart bears often head for the Mt. Mitchell game refuge, knowing they are safe there, but sometimes the pack gets between them and the refuge and they are trapped. In this case, the bears head for the most inaccessible places, or to a good fighting ground. There, if bayed by the dogs, they may climb a tree or fight it out. But a good dog will stick on a trail against any obstacle. Ewart keeps about 12 dogs now (Blue Ticks or Black and Tans mixed with Norwegians and Plotts) and he admits, with the taciturnity of the Appalachian, that they're "pretty good." Sometimes hunters bring other dogs, and occasionally a fresh pack is put onto a trail when the first pack is worn out. However, Ewart says he has known a dog to follow a trail clean out of the county. He has seen a famished, forlorn and weary pack following a trail, bawling weakly, and going at a walk, but still intent on the hunt.

But you don't have to train a bear dog. "One of the bitches will litter, and those pups have never seen a bear or even a bear skin or a bear bone. But you take them out and they won't pay any attention to rabbits, squirrels or anything. Let them strike a fresh bear scent, and they're off and no telling when they'll come home."

That's kind of the way the Wilsons are, too.

EMPLOYEES STRIKE

(Continued from page 1)

occurred, we want to state some facts leading up to and pertaining to it. At this season of the year we always have a drop in our volume of business which necessitates the reduction of the number of our employees.

"We have experienced a very substantial drop in business which was responsible for our laying off three employees on Feb. 20. They were not laid off because they had signed Union cards because the management was never approached by any Union Representative nor

informed that a Union was being or had been organized in the plant when the strike occurred. Had we been approached by a properly certified Union Representative, we would have discussed the matter with such a representative. Our position in this matter is that our employees who want to work be allowed to get into the plant for work which they have a right to do.

"We appealed to the Mayor who provided us with police assistance this (Wednesday) morning, but none of our employees other than the office force were permitted to enter the plant. The whole matter has been referred to the State Dept.

of Labor for consideration.

"HARRY FERGUSON,
"Managing Partner."

The statement from Mr. Eugene Hall, representing the unions of this area, who is directing this strike, is as follows: "On Friday February 20 several of the workers who had signed union cards were laid off for having come up short in their work, according to the management, when a fourth employee offered to assist the three employees that had been laid off in catching up their work she was also laid off. With this and the fact that the employees had asked management for a contract and union recognition, which was

refused, the strike was called."

"The employees are ready and willing to return to work as soon as the management will agree to negotiate a union contract with the workers, the details of the contract to be worked-out after they return to work."

When permanent roosts are used on the turkey range, they should be enclosed in a tight wire fence to keep the turkeys out during the day and the foxes, dogs, and other varmints out during the night.

Since about 60 per cent of the total cost of producing a market turkey is feed, much of this should be produced on your own farm.

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Night Shows: 7:00 & 9:00 P. M.—Mat. Sat.—Late show Sat. 10:30
Adm.: Adults 35c tax incl.—Children under 12 yrs. 12c tax inc.

Saturday, February 28

PRAIRIE EXPRESS

JOHNNY MACK BROWN

OWL SHOW—

BLONDE SAVAGE

LEIF ERICKSON AND GALE SHERWOOD

Sunday, February 29

REPEAT PERFORMANCE

LOUIS HAYWARD AND JOAN LESLIE

Monday and Tuesday, March 1-2

WYOMING

WILLIAM ELLIOTT AND VERA RALSTON

Wednesday, March 3

NEWS HOUNDS

LEO GORCEY AND THE BOWERY BOYS

Thursday-Friday, March 4-5

MOTHER WORE TIGHTS

BETTY GRABLE AND DAN DAILEY

All Children not in arms will have to purchase a ticket to enter any performance at this Theatre.

John Smith Returns To India Sunday

John W. Smith, who with Mrs. Smith and their two children have been spending the past few months in Sylva with Mrs. Smith's mother, Mrs. C. Z. Candler, left Sunday, February 15, for New York, where he sailed on Friday, February 20, aboard the Dutch ship, "Bo:neo", to return to Bombay, India, to resume his work with the Standard Oil Company. Mrs. Smith accompanied him to New York and will visit Mr. Smith's relatives before returning to Sylva. Mr. Smith has been connected with the Standard Oil Company in India for about 16 years. Mrs. Smith and the children plan to return to India in July.

Too Late To Classify

LOST—In or near theatre a few weeks ago a small yellow gold Colbert wrist watch. Initials R. M. B. scratched on back. Return to Mrs. Floyd Bumgarner, Sylva, N. C. 39

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