

ABOUT THE "BIG TOM" WILSON REUNION, 1931

Address by B. R. Ray of Azalea, N. C.

(Editor's note) The following address was made by R. R. Ray in 1931 at a reunion of the family of "Big Tom" Wilson at Stepps Spring Gap. Mrs. R. R. Ray is the granddaughter of "Big Tom" Wilson. She and Mr. Ray left Pensacola, N. C. 35 years ago, and had a host of friends in Yancey County. Mrs. Ray now resides in Biltmore, N. C.

Messrs. A. G. and Ewart Wilson having decided they wanted to get the descendants of the Big Tom Wilson family together at the Wilson lodging house at Stepp Spring Gap, which is only two miles from the summit of Mt. Mitchell, gave an invitation for all the descendants of this noted man to meet at the home of Mr. Ewart Wilson on Saturday, June 20th, at 5 o'clock P. M.

R. R. Ray and family, of Azalea, having been invited to join that happy group, motored over from Asheville just in time to join the happy band as the evening shadows were lengthening, so as to have a cool pleasant drive up the mountain.

So leaving the home of Mr. Ewart Wilson the party did not travel but a short distance up this beautiful valley until they reached the summer home of Judge Adams, where his family spends a great deal of their time throughout the hot summer months, and where he can also join them at weekends and enjoy the cool pleasant breeze under the shadow of Mt. Mitchell.

Passing this beautiful location they found themselves traveling along the bank of the Blue Sea prong of Cane River where the water was so clear as to photograph the blue ethereal sky from above, where you could see the mountain trout swimming about leisurely, seeking for food. Going still further up this stream we came to a point where we could look across to our right and behold the upper Blue Sea Falls, where the water was flowing over a large rock that was so near perpendicular that the water running down this rock is as white as snow, and when the current is a little strong the water falls with such force causing a spray to rise to the extent that when the morning sun is shining brightly, you are able to behold the most beautiful colors of the rainbow.

Passing by this spot of picturesque beauty we soon came to Bear Ridge, and going a little distance came near the spot where Mr. Wilson killed the largest bear of his life. The scenery was beautiful and we stopped along to look at points of interest until we reached the camp, where about 125 of the near relatives of this noted man had

gathered.

After a short time spent in conversation a supper was spread that had no equal except on similar occasions. After supper all gathered in a large room. Messrs. Gene Riddle, Roscoe McMahan and Walter Riddle took down the violin, banjo and guitar and played some of the sweetest music that was possible to be produced, and a number of young people enjoyed those soul-stirring strings so much that it seemed that they were almost bound to dance awhile.

On the morning of the 21st the golden sun rose in all its brilliancy and the atmosphere was exceedingly pleasant, so the entire party decided it best to reach the summit in the early part of the day. The rous was soon seated in trucks and cars and were carried along a very delightful drive to a parking place within 300 yards of the summit and only a few minutes walk, and we were all on the highest point East of the Rockies.

M. P. Ray, who will soon be 88 years of age, said to be the oldest person to have ever made the trip, was a guest of honor, and made the trip easily. Also W. M. Allen, age 82, was a member of this party, to 88 years.

so the age ranged from 3 months. The musicians took their instruments along, went up on top of the tower and continued to produce their sweetest melodies, which string band was said to have been the first to play on top of the tower.

The party returned to the camp about noon. After a splendid dinner, and after more music, a speech was called for. The speaker expressed sincere thanks and appreciation of the crowd to Messrs. A. G. and Ewart Wilson for the free pass over the splendid road they have constructed and the comfortable quarters that they had arranged at Stepp Spring Gap for this reception. After this he referred to Big Tom Wilson as not being only an industrious man, but also a great hunter who killed 117 bears and 144 deers, and smaller game such as turkeys and raccoons almost without number, he being a man with a keen eye, so that very few things ever escaped his observation, and by this gift, granted to very few except the red men, was able to trace the few marks left by Dr. Mitchell, until at last he found the body sleeping in a watery grave and had it not been for him it is very likely that his resting place would never been known until the morning of the Great Resurrection.

The speaker having seen this once strong man with massive form just beginning to stoop from age and hardships, but still he would go alone searching for the wild animals, and when night overtook him he would lie down at the

most convenient place, the leaves of the tree for his bed, the canopy of heaven for his roof. There he would sleep fearlessly until the break of dawn, when he would renew his chase.

While it seemed that in life he ought to have easily reached the 100th milestone, yet by hardship he was stricken down at the age of four score years, while he lingered for about four years in bad health. His once brilliant mind became clouded, and again he lived over his former happy days of chase. But

not until he had passed the age of 84 did this once strong structure of his succumb to the wasting hand of sickness; his body to go down into the valley of the shadow of death, and his spirit return to the God who gave it. Then the speaker referred to the vision of the former night when the stars of light shown forth with all their brilliancy, the way stretched across the heavens, while gazing into space and beholding the planetary worlds as they evolve in perfect harmony, thought of the words of King David when

he said, "What is man that thou visitest him, or the Son of Man that thou art mindful of him?"

When morning light dawned he looked out over so much of nature spread out before him, as if a veil had been lifted, revealing nature in all her exquisite beauty. While he beheld this beautiful panorama, again he wondered if King David beheld a vision half so beautiful as this when he said, "The heavens declare the glory of God, the firmament showeth His handiwork Day unto day uttereth speech, and night

unto night showeth knowledge." Then looking over the audience and seeing some who were very young, some who were reaching the maturity of manhood and womanhood, while others whose lives had crossed the zenith and were going down into the valley of the shadow of death, and while looking into aged faces, could almost hear the call of the boatman, could almost see the stroke of the oar as He is coming to ferry them to the other shore, Then the thought of the speaker was caught away to the thought of

the re-union on the other shore where sickness and sorrow can never come, where the weary shall forever be at rest; for the Lord hath said, "Eye doth not see, ear hath not heard, neither hath it entered into the hearts of any the joys that await the souls of the redeemed," and the sincere hope of the speaker is that we shall all meet in another re-union, where we can walk arm in arm under the shadow of the tree of life; where the music will be strong and sweet that we can fill

(Continued on back page)

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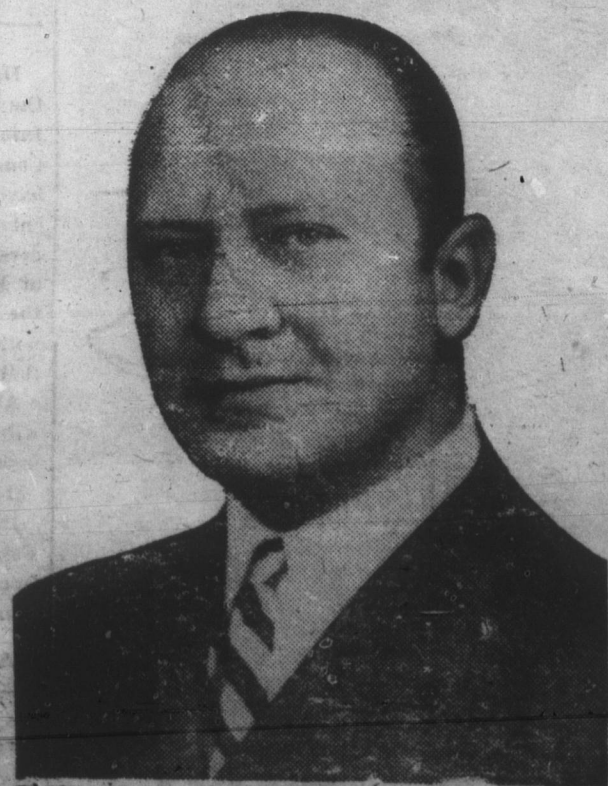


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