

Crock McKenzie was a 'character' in war period

(EDITOR'S NOTE — The Daily Post-Athenian is pleased to present yet another installment of the history of the Civil War in McMinn County as viewed by long-time resident Bill Guffey. Today's "Guffey Story," entitled "A Story of 'Crock' McKenzie," includes remonstrances toward good along with presented examples of the twisting effects of greed and revenge as predicated by the national strife)

By BILL GUFFEY

The War of the States spawned many characters. Some were as evil as a human could get. Others were brave and loved to risk life to see that justice was done to their fellow man.

My grandmother had just reached her teen years when that great war got underway, in the spring of 1861.

The heartaches began when she watched her two handsome brothers, Obadiah and Thomas, march off to war. Her father at that time was a man of great vigor, being in his late forties. Her mother also was youthful looking. Her oldest sister was in love and had prepared to marry but had to postpone the wedding because her sweetheart, "Mac" McKenzie, had marched off to war.

Granny's brother, Obadiah, became a soldier of great fame. His fame brought on great persecution from the Union soldiers who often raided the Shell farm looting and carrying away everything that they could find. The Shell family learned to be very cunning with their wealth. They hid their food and other provisions in caves, and for some time they hid their horses and cattle in corrals in the deep woodland.

Once they were raided by vicious armed men who claimed to be working under the authority of the U.S. government. There were eight of them. They had rifles and each carried a big .44-caliber Colt pistol that had been very popular as a weapon then.

Obadiah, was in bed sick with the measles when a friend of the family rode ahead and warned them the group of eight men were coming after Obadiah to try him for war crimes.

These eight men were really renegades who were acting on their own authority. Actually, the authorities, what few there were at the time, had warrants for the arrest of these evil men. All this happened soon after the close of the war and the government was not well stabilized.

Obadiah escapes

Grandma's brother, Obadiah, made good his escape from the wicked bushwhackers but in doing so he had to leave his family to their mercy. It would have been certain death if he had stayed. Just before the renegades reached the Shell home they spotted a horse in a corral so one of them dismounted and haltered the horse and was bringing it to his companions when the owner of the horse came running toward him demanding him to release the horse.

The renegade pulled his big gun and fired one shot into the poor man, who fell mortally wounded. That was the kind of justice the bushwhackers dealt out.

When Grandma's brother made good his escape the bushwhackers returned to the Shell farm and entered their house, all eight wearing big heavy boots. They demanded food. The Shell women cooked them a big meal and the eight brutal men ate like starved hounds. Once they gorged to their satisfaction they arose from the table and began ransacking the house. It seems they were experts at that for the Shell women had hid a basket of eggs behind the chimney in the upstairs, which were found.

Due to the scarcity of eggs at the time, they were selling for \$12 a dozen. The big bruiser came bounding down the stairs holding the basket of precious eggs high when his boot caught into a snag on the bannister of the stairs tripping him up and he came crashing over the bannister, his head missing a huge fireplace only by inches.

Home ransacked

The basket of eggs that the Shell family had hoped to use to buy their winter clothing was a mess of shells and egg yolks on the living room floor. The man that fell from the stairs was able to walk away after lying on the floor for a few minutes.

When the men had ransacked the house to their satisfaction they concentrated on the barn and other out-buildings. The Shells had hidden all their livestock in the woodland corral except two big fat hogs.

These scalawags butchered those two big hogs right in their pen and all eight carried away about 100 pounds of fresh pork each on their horses' backs.

Crock McKenzie, who had married Grandma's oldest sister, came to the Shell home just hours after the men had left. He had earned his nickname "Crock" when he killed a bear with his hunting knife. He was so named in honor of Davy Crockett, who killed a bear the same way.

Crock McKenzie was a great man of his day. He stood 6'6" tall in his sock feet and he weighed 280 pounds — all muscle and bones. During the war, in hand-to-hand fighting he could pulverize a half dozen Confederate soldiers. But he didn't learn to love his work; in fact, he got sick of war.

When he came home he was so grateful that God had spared his life he repented of all his sins and became a devout Christian. In all that Rogers Creek community no one individual worked any harder for God's Kingdom than Crock McKenzie.

Vengeance desired

When he witnessed the cruelty his mother-in-law had suffered through the eight men Crock left for home and retrieved his war weapons, a rifle and a Colt pistol.

This pistol was a .44-caliber and it only had one chamber for a cartridge — it had to be loaded each time it was fired. However, it was amazing how fast Crock McKenzie could load his gun and draw.

He rode from farm to farm and recruited 16 daring men and in no time they were on the trail of those men. He was driven with the idea of the havoc that had been wreaked by them, of the looting of his wife's family's home, of his wife's brother having been driven into the woods from his sickbed to hide out.

Among Crock's group of vigilantes were former officers from both the Union and Confederate armies. Their motive was to track down the eight men who were murdering innocent people and taking property from the poverty-stricken. They picked up the trail in the knobs just east of Athens.

Everywhere they went it was the same old story. The men had looted each farm along their path and on one occasion had shot down an innocent man in cold blood. The more Crock witnessed their evil deeds, the more he grew to hate the men he stalked.

He had started out to capture the men and bring them before a judge for trial but he was beginning to hope the evil eight would put up a fight so they could be destroyed and the government would be spared an expensive law suit.

The vigilantes were drawing nearer and nearer to the outlaws, who were loaded down with loot, which they hoped to sell in Tellico Plains. As the hunted men came to the level and cleared land just this side of Tellico, though, they decided to battle the vigilantes, hoping their marksmanship would better the two-to-one odds by which they were outnumbered.

Well, it didn't turn out that way. It would appear that the vigilantes also were dead shots, especially Crock McKenzie. Every time Crock fired his target lay mortally wounded. They killed three of the eight and the other five chucked their loot to the ground and ran their horses in desperation. The vigilantes chased them through the town of Tellico on up the Tellico River to the North Carolina line where the renegades scattered and hid.

Crock McKenzie and his vigilantes returned to Athens disappointed because five of the eight escaped, but happy to report that they did fix three of them so they could never cause trouble on this earth again.

Bad ways taken

During that area of time one day of the week was set aside in Athens for the horse traders. Crock had great knowledge about domestic animals so always he made good on that day. When the horse trading was over Crock always had his pockets full of greenbacks and silver coins.

At that time there were two saloons in Athens and it was legal to drink and sell whisky. Crock had three small children at that time ranging in ages from three to six. I can tell you that year it was for my dad was eight years old and dad was born in the year of 1868, so the year I am telling about had to be 1876.

Crock would go to the horse traders fair. Always he seemed to prosper in horse trading and after it was over he would go on a binge and spend a portion of his horse trading money.

Crock had been informed that a black man had given the eight evil bushwhackers directions to Obadiah Shell's home. He was so angry with the black informer he suddenly became what we hear lots of today as "racist." After Crock patronized the two saloons and satisfied his thirst he would walk to the part of town where the black man lived and challenge any two black men for a fight — fist and skull. Black men were noted for their courage in those days so Crock always got challengers.

Two would advance on to Crock who waited until they were in good range then he would kick one of his challengers with his size-18 boot and

strike the other one. They said of Crock that he never failed to render a man unconscious when he scored a hit with his foot or his ham-like fist.

Murder in his heart

Crock was living on his father-in-law's farm. Jim Shell had a peach orchard right on the same ground that Fred Wankan has a beautiful home on Spring Creek ridge. Crock's wife had sent her three lovely children to the orchard to get peaches for a pie.

The black man that had been credited for giving the eight bushwhackers directions to Obadiah Shell's home lived at the foot of the ridge just below the Shell peach orchard. He had three children that were three or four years older than the McKenzie children. When the little McKenzie children reached their grandfather's orchard, they were roughed up by the black

children who were uninvited guests in the Shell orchard.

Crock McKenzie had wanted to punish the black man for informing on his favorite brother-in-law, Obadiah Shell, but he had suppressed the great desire because he knew very well it would get him in great trouble with the sheriff. When he came home and found out his children had been abused he angrily went to the black man's door.

The man's wife barred the door, saying her husband was in bed sick with the gripe. Crock could be a gentle man if he tried so he told the black lady he must talk with her husband to see if he could help him.

Crock entered the "sickroom" with the purpose of talking to him about counseling his children to be more gentle with his. The black man agreed to talk to his kids then Crock's eye caught an opening in the quilt covering over the black man and saw he was wearing boots.

Crock goes crazy

Crock with his long reach seized the quilt that covered the black man revealing him lying there in full dress with a pick handle gripped in his right hand. He swung the seasoned handle at Crock's head but he warded off most of the blow, grabbing the black man by his long sinewy arm and snatching the pick handle from his grip.

In Crock's great anger he beat the man savagely, ignoring the screaming wife and children in the doorway. Crock satisfied his lust for vengeance and returned home with lots of the man's bloodstains on his coat and pants.

The sheriff took out a warrant for Crock's arrest as the black man charged him with forceful entry and attempt of murder. Crock talked it over with his wife. At that time the doctor had told my grandparents that it was imperative that they move to a higher altitude for both their lungs were very sore.

They moved to a farm over beyond where Dayton now is, on Walden's Ridge. Dayton was only a couple of farms that year but they began to build that Southern Railroad for Dad was a lad of eight years, so the year was 1876. Crock told his wife he was going to seek sanctuary with my grandparents on Walden's Ridge until he could pay off his prosecutors.

Crock kept in touch with his lawyer at Athens and in the meantime he helped Grandpa farm. When Grandpa heard that a huge construction camp was located right where Dayton now is he gathered a wagon load of green beans, potatoes, apples and other vegetables to see the camp. Crock helped to load the produce but he feared to go along as he was a fugitive from justice.

Crock's lawyer had made some progress negotiating with the black man who was prosecuting Crock. The black man acknowledged that he himself had provoked Crock into attacking him. He told Crock's lawyer if Crock would pay him damages for the savage beating he gave him in his own house he would withdraw his suit against him.

The big hat

There is another story of Crock I left out that I am sure many of you would like to hear. It goes like this.

A very prominent man of Athens made a business trip to Mexico. That would be about 1867. Not too many had the privilege of visiting south of the border in those days and those who did brought back a wealth of souvenirs.

This prominent man was a special friend to the sheriff who had warrants for Crock McKenzie. He bought many souvenirs to bring back to the states but he shopped longer for the sheriff's present than any of the others.

He ended up by buying the sheriff a great wide straw hat. It was doubtful if any in Athens had ever seen a hat half so large. The sheriff was very proud of his hat. He kept it in his office and showed it to all his visitors.

The day he was handed the warrants for Crock McKenzie's arrest his friends told him worriedly that they sure did not envy him his job. The sheriff sat the big Mexican hat on to his head and said boastfully "when Crock sees this hat he will go as meek as a lamb."

The sheriff and his one deputy mounted their horses and rode off in the direction of Crock McKenzie's home. Crock lived on a high ridge where he saw the sheriff and the deputy coming for him.

Quick escape

Crock just barely had time to saddle his horse and kiss his wife and children. The sheriff and his deputy began to gain distance on Crock at the very beginning. They were just one hundred yards past where Ramon F. Guffey now lives when the sheriff took a shot at Crock.

chunk out of Crock's mackinaw. That made Crock angry and when Crock got mad he had no thought of tomorrow. He thought the sheriff was trying to kill him, so why not kill the sheriff first? He aimed at what he thought was the sheriff's forehead but luckily for the sheriff, the crown of that big hat was higher than Crock thought it was.

When Crock's bullet plowed into the sheriff's hat it raised the big hat up several feet. The sheriff and the deputy turned their steeds around and by the time that big hat landed on the ground the sheriff and his deputy were nearly

to the present site of the Ramon Guffey's house.

Crock picked up the big hat noticing his bullet had made a hole big enough to fit his index finger. After Crock reached the home of my grandparents he would sit by the fire and twirl that big hat on his finger for hours at a time.

Grandpa would ask Crock, "Where did you get that awful hat?" His answer

was, "I am going to let someone else tell you that, George." And he did just that for Grandpa didn't learn the facts about the big hat until they moved back to McMinn County.

Crock made a settlement with the black man and the sheriff tore up the warrants. For that Crock returned the hat and it hung in the sheriff's office.

A gentleman named Leslie told me. Crock was buried in a neat little cemetery near Hillsview in the Rogers Creek vicinity. I mentioned in one section of my story that Crock was a racist. However, Crock hiked though unfriendly territory for more than a hundred miles and joined the Union army and fought to liberate the black man.

Note: FRANCIS MARION MCKENZIE, variously called "Frank", "Mack", "Crockett" and "Crock", was born at Riceville, McMinn Co., Tenn. 17 Dec. 1851, fifth child of Francis Marion McKenzie, born N.C. c.1820, and his wife Amanda, born Tenn. c.1825. The 1860 Tenn. Census, taken 27 June at Riceville, shows FRANCIS aged 9, living with his parents. The 1870 Census shows FRANCIS, aged 18, still living at home with his parents. On 16 Oct. 1870 FRANCIS married NANCY ABIGAIL SHELL, called "Nannie", born 17 Jan. 1852 at Spring Creek, McMinn Co., sixth child of James B. Shell (11 March 1817 - 8 Dec. 1877) and his wife Lucinda White (26 Feb. 1824 - 16 Sep. 1903), second child of Obediah and Martha, called "Patsy", (Mansell) White.

Francis Marion McKenzie clearly was not a soldier during the Confederate War, being only aged 13 when the war ended in April 1865.

Charity Rebecca Shell (11 June 1846 - 29 May 1933), who married 20 Dec. 1866 George Washington Guffey, was the second of the nine Shell sisters. She and her younger sister Nancy Abigail were the only two to escape tuberculosis which their brother, Captain Obediah White Shell, C.S.A. (28 Mar. 1844 - 24 Mar. 1875) apparently contracted while on military duty 1861-1865 and transmitted to his sisters.

In 1881 Francis Marion and Nancy Abigail (Shell) McKenzie emigrated to Arkansas where he served as Sheriff of Franklin County. Their only surviving child, James Obediah McKenzie, was born at Spring Creek, McMinn Co., Tenn. 12 March 1872. Nancy Abigail (Shell) McKenzie died in Franklin Co., Ark. 14 Aug. 1913. Francis Marion McKenzie died in Norman, Okla. in 1927.

Family ties survive the crucible of hard Civil War

(EDITOR'S NOTE — Included here is another "Guffey Story" concerning the aftermath of the Civil War. The Daily Post-Athenian is pleased to present this recollection of a long-time McMinn County resident.)

By BILL GUFFEY

The one thing that never ceases to amaze me is the attitude my grandmother took of the horrors of the Civil War. Before the great Civil War she was a member of a beautiful family consisting of both parents, two brothers and six beautiful sisters..

Very few knew the awful persecution that family suffered because of their allegiance to the Confederate cause. Because of their thrift and ingenuity, they were by far the richest family materially and spiritually for miles around. They were a praying family that gave God full credit for every decent thing they had.



When an evil war comes to your fireside how does one know which side to support? Granny's family followed their conscience and defended what they thought was their home land.

Granny's brother, Obidiah, turned out to be a soldier of greatness. His deeds were talked about around the camp fires of both the Union and Confederate armies.

The Shell farm suddenly became the object of Union raids during the war. The Union troops carried off their stock, tools and grain. They even took their salt and in those days they had to go as far as to the seashore for salt.

How could they get salt now since their wagons had been confiscated as well as their stock?

Hard times

They had to dig up the dirt floor of the smoke house and render it to get the salt that had dripped from their meat over the years. That family suffered enough abuse to kill an average one. It did break the father down but the others managed to hold on and struggle tenaciously to live.

Now as we all know the war did end but strife did not. They were plagued by what some called carpetbaggers while others referred to

them as "bushwhackers." Granny lost an heroic brother and four lovely sisters through the cruelty of those evil agents.

I can testify to the beauty of these four sisters because when I was a boy, Granny had their pictures hanging in her parlor. That parlor was off limits to most people but Granny often allowed me to enter the huge heavily carpeted room where I would live for hours in the past.

I would stand under those four portraits and try to understand how such injustice could have happened in a nation so great at the United States.

Once, when I stood under the portrait of Great Grandfather Shell I noticed something so wrong I went to Grandma for an explanation. I said to her: "Grandma, did your father have the mumps when he had this picture made?"

"No, Willie," I remember she said. "He did not have the mumps. Dad was very sick when the picture was made. He had lost lots of weight and the artist advised him to puff his cheeks out with air to look natural and Dad must have puffed a bit too strong. But, Willie, I hadn't notice that before. Leave it to a child to notice these things!"

The old trunk

One day we went to Grandpa's trunk and she opened the big lid and handed me a pocket book containing currency and a picture of Grandpa hold a rifle at this side.

She said the picture of Grandpa was taken the day he left Somerset, Kentucky in late 1863. "Your Grandpa was a sick man at that time," she said. "The money you see is the exact amount he brought home from the war."

I helped her lift the big tray to one side where I saw a blue uniform neatly folded. She explained that it was the same uniform that Grandpa wore home when he was mustered out from the war.

It must have held many memories for her for she suddenly became silent and I dared not break into that moment of tranquility. That trunk held a treasure that I would not have traded for Fort Knox. I wonder what became of it. I do hope some of the family has it.

Although the huge log house was destroyed by fire some years later, I do believe Grandma had moved out of the old homeplace as she was a widow and getting frail in health.

I just can't imagine where that trunk is, but I do pray that it is in the hands of a grandchild.

Now Granny amazed me by the way she could cast the horrors of

war aside and appear to forget all about the many tragedies and heartaches the war gave her. She only talked of periods of the war that were amusing and one would be surprised there were any.



Family feud

Granny once told a group of us grandchildren a long story about two families of neighboring people by the name of Cannon and McKenzie. It seems that these two families were of Irish descent and had for many years been the best of friends. In each household there was a stalwart unmarried young man. Those two young men were bosom pals from the days of their childhood.

Jasper Cannon and Crockett McKenzie were the two strongest men in the area. Any mother around would have been proud to have had either for a son-in-law but neither of the two had shown any interest in the maidens of the neighborhood until one day of all things they both hit Granny's eldest sister for a date.

Her sister was carrying a torch for "Crock" McKenzie but she dared not give him a date for fear of what it might do to Jasper Cannon. Some big-mouthed kid blabbed it to Crockett McKenzie why Dolly Shell would not date him and that started a feud that lasted until the start of the Civil War.

When war broke out the two of them were loyal to the Union and that improved their relations. Though the war took its toll, Jasper Cannon and Crockett McKenzie made it back. Still the two of them saw war in its most horrible form and they both seized every opportunity to be in the house of God.

On this one particular night there was a revival going on at the neighborhood church and both McKenzie and Cannon were there. The meeting was getting off to a slow start when Crock rose to his feet to testify. Brocker McKenzie did not have to search for words. They came from his strong chest as if he was a

professional. This is about the way Granny remembered it:

"Dear God, I thank you for bringing me safely home. I am going to devote all my spare time to the service of your kingdom, God. I saw four years of war where I saw many bodies torn by cannonball. Dear God, I feel so happy to know that I am bound for a home that is free of strife and, thank God, there will be no cannons there!"

Granny was watching Jasper Cannon and she thought she saw a note of irritation in his expression. McKenzie continued by saying, "Dear God, I ask you to give me wisdom so I can better aid your cause for I can hardly wait to enter my heavenly home where — thank you, dear God — there will be no cannons!"

Jasper Cannon jumped to his feet and shouted, "I guess there will be as many Cannons as there are McKenzies!" It took a second or two for Brother McKenzie to realize what he had done then he walked to Brother Cannon with his arms outstretched saying, "Oh, Brother Cannon, I was referring to war cannons!"

In a moment those two big muscular giants were unashamedly locked in each other's arms. Their sentiments for each other aroused the congregation so

that in a moment's time there was bedlam of shouting and some souls were saved that night. I tried to tell this story right but somehow or other it just wasn't as good as when Granny told it.

'Granny Riggins'

Granny liked to tell about an eccentric old lady well known by all who was called "Granny Riggins." Granny Riggins lived alone in her well-constructed log cabin. She had a partly closed area in back where she kept a large broom of her own construction made out of rough straw.



It had been hinted around the neighborhood that Granny Riggins was a witch. Two different children

had vowed they saw her sailing high in the air on that knotty broom on a Halloween night. When Granny was confronted with the tales she would neither confirm nor deny them.

It was my grandmother's belief that Granny Riggins actually wanted people to think she was a witch. It had one great advantage — she was seldom bothered with ill-mannered kids for they feared her as they would a tiger.



Among Granny Riggins' odd tastes was a burning desire to watch a live battle. She had witnessed a small skirmish once and instead of curing her from wanting to see a battle it just seemed to make her desire all the greater.

Well, it just so happened that an ambitious young Confederate officer with a strong body of well-trained men began to camp right in her neighborhood. They were harassing the Union supply line. When this Confederate force became known to General Hooker he gave the report to an ambitious young Union Captain and told him to take sufficient men and arms to destroy the Confederate force. Now much to Granny Riggins' delight, the two forces prepared for combat right near her soil. As the two forces started their gory battle Granny Riggins took a seat on a zig-zag fence where she had a birds-eye view of the battle. It was just exactly to her notion. She was watching men fall from the shots of rifles and hearing the agony of death and enjoying every moment of it. The battle wasn't going well for either side as both were losing men they could not replace. The opposing officers decided to use the old army trick of out-maneuvering their enemy. Granny Riggins didn't know about that. She had no notion of moving for she had seen men die by the dozens and besides she was comfortable. She had just what she had wanted for some time.

The two enemy forces changed positions too gradually for Granny to

notice and the result was that she became caught in a crossfire. Both the Union and the Confederate bullets were taking chunks out of her calico dress. She let out a blood-curdling scream and began to run in the direction of her cabin. Both sides noticed her dilemma about the same time and they held their fire until she reached the safety of her cabin. Needless to say, she remained in the safety of her home during the remaining months of the war.

When death was hitting the soldiers so relentlessly Granny Riggins looked on with a certain amount of fascination. But when the moment appeared that she also might die, death became a thing of horror.

A curt reply

A couple of years ago I chanced to be out in that area where Granny Riggins lived and died. I talked to a handsome man in his late twenties, who told me he was a descendant of hers. I don't remember his first name, but his last name was Pettit. I believe he still lives on the same land Granny Riggins owned during the Civil War. He just might read this and remember me. I am the same man who came with the cab driver who drove him home several years ago. The cab driver was G.C. Kennedy.



I do not know what happened to Jasper Cannon, but Crock McKenzie married my grandmother's eldest sister. He was a giant of a man, 6'6" tall and very muscular.

He, like his brother-in-law Obidiah Shell, had trouble with the sheriff on a few occasions. One night while hiding out from the strong arm of the law, he was sleeping on his back with nothing but the sky for a roof. He began to feel a dead weight on his chest and looked through the slits of his eyelids to see a huge timber rattlesnake crawling there.

Now Crock knew the virtue of keeping calm. At that hour a rattler was carrying the heaviest load of venom. If the huge snake bit him it meant death for there was no way for him to get to a doctor. He simply remained still until the snake crawled off of him then he jumped to his feet and killed it.

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