

Barbara J. Hobson
2020 Sherwood Drive #323
Johnson City, TN 37601

n
36

GRANNY HACKLE

Ask the old-timers anywhere in the Eastern Tennessee mountains about Granny Hackle and they will most likely tell you she was a witch, and nod knowingly as they tell you so. But according to the few records left from her time, Granny Hackle didn't get to be a witch until after she died. While living she was better known as the "Old Medicine Woman".

No one in Tennessee rightly knew just where Granny Hackle came from. She first appeared riding sidesaddle on a great black stallion in the Sinking Creek country one spring day. Some say it was in the year 1766, others claim it was 1776.

A tall, stern-faced youth of twenty who looked to be half Indian preceded Granny on foot. His name was Tom Hyder, and he was a mute. Adam Honeycut, a withered, silent little old man led a packhorse behind the black stallion.

This tiny procession stopped at the cabin of Delph and Mariah Gurley on the Watauga River and the first report on the trio comes from Mariah, who was alone that day, Delph having gone deer hunting.

"The old woman," Mariah said, "was dressed all in black, even her sunbonnet. I ain't never goin' to forget her piercin' eyes, black as Satan's heart, an' the little bunches of stiff gray hairs that stood out from the sides of her chin like a cat's whiskers. Her two menfolks was dressed in deerskins, an' both carried rifle guns. I gived 'em buttermilk fresh out of the cellar-house, an' sold 'em a fritch of bacon, an' they went their way on to'ards Watauga Old Fields. I never did see the men again, but I looked on the old woman, at the time of her burvin'."

Granny Hackle and her retinue reached Watauga Old Fields on an afternoon in May, though how they ever crossed Lick Creek remained a mystery. Heavy rains in the mountains had turned the stream into a roaring flood, and there were no bridges.

Half a dozen families had settled in or about Watauga Old Fields, attracted to the place because it had been cleared and farmed by Cherokee Indians before the arrival of white men. Granny Hackle's party camped there two days, and during most of every daylight hour they were scouting the forests around. North, South East and West they went, always searching.

It was almost dusk on the second day when the old woman demonstrated the first of those strange powers that were to earn for her title, "Medicine Woman", and later, "witch".

That evening Lige Bogard had come in from the cornfield and was cutting stovewood before sitting down to supper. While trimming a chestnut log, Lige's axe glanced off a hard knot and the keen blade continued on down, slicing a great wound in the calf of his left leg. Lige's eight-year-old son, Seth, saw the blood spurting from a severed artery and ran screaming to the house for help. Soon the entire settlement was in an uproar.

Granny Hackle heard the commotion and came to see. Bob Singletary and Lige's wife, Hallie, were trying vainly to staunch the bleeding. The old woman shoved her way through the crowd that had gathered. Granny Hackle hovered over the injured man, her dark face strangely grim and foreboding, but only for a moment; then she stooped and lifted Hallie Bogard to her feet.

"There's no call to fret," she assured Hallie. "Your man'll be as

right as rain soon's the wound heals itself. See! Hit ain't bleedin' now."

' Hallie looked, and sure enough the bleeding had completely stopped. "Hit's a miracle!" Hallie whispered and knelt to cradle Lige's head in her arms. "yes, hit's purely a miracle." Then she looked at the neighbors clustered near. "Somebody He'p me git him inside the house."

Bob Singletary said later, "Twere an amazin' thing. There me an' Hallie was, squeezin' Lige's leg as hard as we could, tryin' to shut off his life blood, but 'tweren't no use. Then this old woman come up an' stood a-lookin' down at Lige. So help me, that's all she done, just looked at him, an' afore I could-a said Jack Robinson, the bleedin' stopped. "Twere about time, too, 'cause Lige was a-gettin' powerful weak. He couldn't a stood much more."

From that day on Granny Hackle's ability to stop bleeding was common knowledge in the settlement, and the old woman was called upon in many later emergencies.

Early the next morning Granny Hackle mounted her stallion and rode out along what was later to be called Smalling Road, and the crest of a long, low ridge which was spotted here and there by outcroppings of white limestone. The ridge, lying between the higher mountains beyond the river was crossed by a little-used trail. Beside this trail, in a saddle-like dip in the rocky ridge, Granny pointed to a level spot beneath towering oaks.

"Build my cabin here," she told Tom Hyder and Adam Honeycut.

They built it well, with logs of virgin poplar and a punchoon floor of straight-grained black walnut, hewed to an almost perfect smoothness. The few women of the community who saw this floor marveled at Granny's choice of walnut rather than the usual poplar or white oak, because

those fortunate enough to have puncheon floors took great pride in scouring and bleaching them to a remarkable whiteness. Granny also scoured her floor, until it took on the rich patina of ancient ivory.

Later, Tom and Adam built a smaller cabin for themselves, also a stable and when this was done they began to clear land for corn, potatoes and tobacco.

The three made an odd combination. Adam Honeycut, a quiet, thoughtful man, never spoke to anyone unless it was necessary and Tom Hyder, while friendly and likable enough, couldn't speak. His eyesight and hearing were remarkably acute, however, and he was skilled in the Indian sign language. The sober-faced youth soon became a familiar figure throughout the Watauga Settlement, and a favorite with the children for whom he made willow whistles and alder popguns and squirt-guns. He also knew how to make bows and arrows, and strange harps that made music only when the wind blew.

As for Granny Hackle, she spent many hours riding or tramping through the woods, adding to her already amazing assortment of herbs, roots, leaves and bark. She too, had a somewhat disconcerting habit of appearing unexpectedly in the most unlikely places, and oddly enough at times when she could be of service.

That is how it was when Celia Robertson fell and broke her leg. Will, her husband, had gone up into the Holston Settlements for supplies, including salt, and Celis, left alone, tripped over a hidden vine while trying to drive their one obstreperous cow into the milking pen. Somehow Celia managed to crawl to the cabin and into bed, but since there was no one she could send for help, she lay there unattended for two whole days. She was in a bad way when Granny Hackle rode up on her black stallion.

Despite her age, which was great even then, the old woman showed amazing strength as she lifted Celia about, changing the bed, getting the injured woman into her long nightgown, and finally inspecting the broken bone. It was, fortunately, a clean break midway between knee and ankle.

Granny Hackle looked at the swollen limb, clucked sympathetically, then went to get a doeskin bag from her saddle. From this she selected various dried herbs which she set to boiling on the fire and afterward strained. Compresses dipped in this evil-smelling concoction reduced the swelling in time. The old woman then expertly set the broken bone and applied crude splints. Before morning Celia was sleeping peacefully, the first real rest she had known in two days.

Granny Hackle remained long enough to cook up a rich broth which she gave Celia when the latter awakened. In the meantime she milked the cow which, because of painfully full udder, came willingly enough to the pen. Later the old woman rode to the Camerons, Celia's nearest neighbors, and Martha, the eldest Camerons, daughter, went to stay with the injured woman.

Much the same thing happened the night little Prissy Womack lay near death with croup. The Womacks had done everything they knew to relieve the child's suffering, but she grew constantly worse until well past midnight. Then, out of the darkness came the sound of clopping hoof-beats. Granny Hackle's horse! A natural pacer, the black stallion's hooves beat out rapid-fire tattoo familiar to everyone on the settlement.

Granny Hackle came to the Womack's door carrying her doeskin

g and gave Stephan Womack a level glance when he opened to her knock. "Hit come to me in the night," she said camly, "That a child is sick. Be that child here?"

"Ja! "Ja! It is our Prissy. I'm a-feared she's makin' out to die." Wide-eyed and eager, Stephan stepped back from the doorway.

The old woman moved swiftly across the dirt floor to where Esther Womack held the infant in her arms, rocking desperately because she knew nothing else to do. Granny Hackle laid her bony hand against the child's forehead, listened to the rattling labored breathing, and opened her bag.

Git me some boilin' water-quick! she command Womack, and began selecting certain herbs from her supply. As she worked, she spoke to Esther.

"Hit ain't no use a-rockin' her. Lay the child in her cradle, then git me a good clean sheet."

Wordlessly Esther obeyed, and while she rummaged in the corner shelves, Granny Hackle dropped herbs into the pan of water Stephan had boiling. At once a pungent odor rose and filled the room.. It was a piney, spicy smell that was somehow cooling and refreshing to the lungs.

Granny Hackle took the sheet from Esther and spread it tent like over the cradle, then took the steaming kettle from Stephan and thrust it inside the canopy, well away from the strangling child.

Nothing happened for a few minutes, then the harsh, rasping sound of breathing changed to a loose hoarseness and the infant coughed. Granny hackle lifted the canopy and with a linen

cloth helped the baby rid herself of the mucous her coughing had released. Gradually the labored breathing eased, and when Granny Hackle rose from her knees an hour later, little Prissy was sleeping quietly.

"Hit's over," the old woman told Esther Womack. She turned to Stephan " I recommend that you heat this kettle to bilin' again, an' let the child breathe its steam once more. Hit might be a good notion to put a kiver on it an' keep the brew till later. Could be you'll need it afore mornin."

After the old woman had gone, Esther looked at her husband with wonderment in her eyes. "How d'you reckon she knowed, Stephan? How'd she know to come here, 'stead of some other place?"

"Stop worryin' about the whys an' wherefores, woman," Stephan told her. "Jest be grateful to the Lord for givin' little Prissy back to us."

Esther was not so easily satisfied. She shook her head thoughtfully, whispering, "Hit's purely a miracle, how she knowed. I reckon the Lord must-a told her where to come."

Granny Hackle's store of knowledge seemed unlimited. There was, for instance, the day when Art Brownlow's hunting dog began running around in circles, frothing at the mouth and frightening folks almost out of their wits. The dreadful cry, "Mad Dog! ran through the settlement like fire in cotton linters.

Art was out with his rifle, trying to get a good shot at the stricken animal when Granny Hackle came riding up. The yelping dog raced toward her and straight beneath the black stallion, then took refuge in a lean-to beside the barn. Art ran up and

shut the door and was preparing to shoot the dog through a crack in the wall when the old woman stopped him.

"Wait!" She said sharply.

Art looked at her coldly. "Why? He's mad. I got to kill him afore he kills us or some of the farm critters."

"Good dog, ain't he?"

"He was," Art admitted gloomily. "Best huntin' animal I ever owned."

"He's still a good dog."

Art spat and frowned at her. "Go 'long, woman, an' leave a man do what he must do."

She paid no attention to his words, but dismounted. "You got a big horse blanket or a old quilt?"

He blinked at her, his face red. "For Why"?

The old woman straightened and put her black eyes on him. "Stop askin' fool question! Git me a blanket or a quilt, an' I'll give you back your dog, good as new."

Art gaped at her a moment, muttering under his breath, then went into the barn and got a moth-eaten old saddle blanket. Granny took it from him and walked to the shed door. "Open It," she said to Art.

"He'll bite you sure, old woman." "Open the door!"

He did so and Granny Hackle went inside.. The dog, still voicing his agony, cowered in a corner and she tossed the blanket over him. She bundled it about the dog until he was helpless, then carried him outside. The only part of him that showed was his snout and a part of his head.

"Hold him the old woman snapped, and Art gingerly clamped

his hands about the struggling bundle. Granny Hackle slid her palm across the dog's wild eyes and clasped her other hand about his jaws, squeezing tender lips against sharp teeth until the dog opened his mouth wide. The old woman peered closely, grunted a monosyllable, then reached inside the parted jaws and plucked out a sliver of chicken bone.

"There's your mad dog," she said accusingly, and began to unwrap the shivering animal. He leaped to his feet, wiped his jaws a time or two on the grass, then, with a grateful swipe of his long tongue across Granny's hand raced joyously around the barnyard.

Art showed shame in the way he looked at Granny. "I'm obliged, ma'am, an' I must say it were right kind of you to help. I'm beholden to you,"

Granny only reply was a little nod. She untied the stallion led him to the upping block, then lifted herself to side saddle. From this vantage point she looked down at Art. "You know better'n to give a dog chicken bones, " she said, "specially leg bones. That there sliver were wedged atween his jaw teeth an' they weren't no earthly way he could git it out his ownself."

Doctors and money were almost equal scarcities in the remote Watauga settlement. Those who benefitted by Granny Hackle's ministering were appreciative enough, but they could not pay for her services in cash. They did what they could, however, by gifts of salt, fish from the mountain streams, corn, potatoes and like, with now and then a quarter of venison or a wagon load of hay. As the months passed and Granny's skill in the art of healing became a accepted fact in the community, people gradually came to speak of her as

"The Old Medicine Woman".

Granny Hackle wandered far in her search for the herbs and other materials that went into her concoctions for the sick. In time she became almost as well known about **Jonesboro** and along the Doe River as she was at Watauga.

The old woman tried once to join the New Light Baptist Church, but was denied membership because, the deacons said, "there were too many strange going on about her place." She sat with the regular Baptist a few Sundays, but never became a member of the congregation.

Years passed and the strange trio composed of Granny Hackle, Adam Honeycut and Tom Hyder had become an accepted part of the community, then, one winter day, old Adam tried to cross the river at Elizabethton on thin ice. He broke through and drowned. They did not find his body until a March freshet brought it ashore at the mouth of Lick Creek. They buried Adam in a little graveyard on the northeast point of Granny Hackle's limestone ridge.

It seemed to some that Adam Honeycut's passing was an omen, because it wasn't long afterward that Tom Hyder, nailing a shoe on Granny's black stallion, was kicked to death. It happened when a pheasant took flight from a clump of bushes by the barn. The black horse reared in fright, Tom went sprawling in the dirt, then the horse kicked savagely and his newly shod hoof struck Tom in the head. They buried him beside Adam.

After that Granny Hackle continued to minister to the ailing, but she was much less active than before and spent a great deal of time alone in her cabin. She was there the day Hugh Brownlow rode up on a lathered horse, carrying his twelve year old daughter, Emily, in his arms. She had been bitten by a rattlesnake.

Granny Hackle, now a very old woman and slightly palsied, heated a knife in the flame of candle, made a slit in the girl's leg where the fangs had struck, then put her mouth to the wound and drew what poison she could from it. Afterward she poulticed the cut with herbs from her doeskin bag and made a strong tea which she gave little Emily to drink.

They sat together, Granny Hackle and Hugh Brownlow, until late that evening. Shortly before midnight a sweat came out upon Emily's forehead and her breathing grew more regular.

"She'll live," Granny Hackle said then. "You can take her home now." She sat a few minutes longer, stroking the girl's corn colored hair and the rounded cheeks with their rosy flush of fever. "T'is a wonderful thing to be young," she told Hugh. "Your child will grow into a purely handsome woman." She lifted a strand of golden hair and let it fall lightly from bony fingers. "Find her a good husband when the time comes."

Then Granny Hackle raised her misty eyes to Hugh Brownlow and said a trifle harshly, "Tis a lonesome life for a woman without a man. See to it this child finds love."

At that moment, for some reason, Hugh felt closer to the old woman than at any time before. "Granny," he asked suddenly, "How is it that you are willin' to wear yourself out a-carin' for us mountain folk? 'Tain't reasonable, somehow, an' we can't

ever hope to pay you back for everything."

The wrinkled face softened in the candle light and she absently stroked the sleeping child's hand. "'Tis the Lord's will. So says the Book... that there be many gifts from the Spirit to men. The Lord expects us to use his gifts. To one is give the word of wisdom, to another the word of knowledge; to others faith, and to some the power to work miracles. Some of us that the Spirit has blessed with the gifts of healin'. If my gift be healin', then I must do as Jesus his self said, "Heal the sic, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils. Freely ye have received, freely give."

She lifted her face and there was the trace of a smile on her thin lips. "I ain't never raised the dead or cast out ary devils that I knowed about, but I've done the best I knowed how.

Oddly enough it was Hugh Brownlow who saw Granny Hackle die, not two weeks later. Hugh was returning from Elizabethton in early afternoon, trying to reach home before a storm broke. Great banks of threatening clouds had swept in from the west, then these thunder heads had given way to a darkening sheet of coppery yellow in which thunder rolled almost continuously and out of which javelins of lightning stabbed toward the earth in brilliant streaks.

As Hugh told Elvira, his wife, later, "When I come ferninst Granny Hackle's place I could tell the storm was nigh, an' I didn't want to git my salt wet; so I rode quick up to her cabin, thinkin" to shelter in the barn till the storm was over.

"The wind was a whistlin' through the gap, only it weren't

rightly a whistlin'. 'Twere more like music. Sometimes it were like a choir singin', other time it were more like music, an' other times it minded me of a organ I once heard in Roanake.

"Well, I didn't see hide nor hair of Granny Hackle, so I took my horse inside the lean-to an' hadn't more'n got sheltered when the storm hit.

"Hearin Granny's black stallion a-whickerin' in the barn, I looked in on him an' his manger plumb empty. The horse whickered some more, pawed at the floor, an' bobbed his head at me. I got him a measure of corn from the bin, forked some hay into the manger, an' the critter gobbled it like he was starvin'.

"Knowin' how much the black meant to Granny, I figured right off that something were wrong, So, quick as the rain slacked a bit I went over to her cabin an' knocked, but there weren't no answer. I knocked some more, an' finally pulled the latch string an' went in.

"Granny Hackle lay on her pallet in a corner by the fire place. She were alive, but that were all. I brung her a crust of bread, some water, an a bit of venison that was still in the pot. She managed down a mite of it, but not much. The water seemed to do her most good.

"I wanted to go fetch out a woman from the settlement to look after her, but Granny wouldn't have it. "Hit's my time," she whispered. 'Things that has a beginnin' must have a end. This is mine.

I ast her could I git her somethin' from her doeskin bag, but she shook her head. 'I would take it kindly, though, if

you would set with me a while, 'she said, an' then she smiled. 'Twere the first time I ever seen her smile. 'I ain't afeared to die', she said so low I had to bend down to listen, 'but it's a comfort to have somebody nigh'."

Granny Hackle lapsed into a coma then and for several minutes never moved. Presently she opened her eyes and sought Hugh's face with eyes that saw little. She fumbled for his hand and gripped it hard.

"My Horse-my stallion", she whispered. "I give him to you. Treat him kindly an' he will carry you far and well."

"Why, thank you, ma'am", Hugh stammered. "Of course I'll treat him well. He's a fine horse, a mighty fine animal."

Granny Hackel smiled a little once again, then her fingers loosened their grip on Hugh's hand, her head relaxed upon her pillow, and she was still.

Hugh Brownlow passed the word of Granny Hackle's death as he rode through the Watauga Settlement, but did not stop to chat. He reached his own home in late afternoon, tired to the point of exhaustion.

Elvira met him at the door. "Oh, Hugh, I've been so worried! The storm an' everything...an' our little Sally like to a-died whilst you was gone."

He questioned her, and Elvira told him how young Steve Cobb had been playing in their yard, learning to throw a knife Indian fashion. One throw had gone wild and the heavy knife struck Sally in the upper arm, severing an artery.

"It were awful, Hugh", she cried, weeping again at the thought of it. "I couldn't stop the bleedin', an' our Sally

would a died if the Old Medicine Woman hadn't come, an'..." Elvira stopped to stare blankly at Hugh, then she added faintly, "nobody seen her go, neither."

"Go on, woman," Hugh said tensely. "What about Granny Hackle? Tell me all that happened."

"Well," Elvira said doubtfully, "hit were like so many other times. Granny just stood lookin' at Sally, then she turned to me an' said, Little Emily's sister will live. The bleedin' has stopped.! An' sure enough, it had."

Hugh gripped his wife's arm hard. "When did all this happen?" he asked, eyes dark with secret meaning. "Tell me, 'Virey, when?"

"Why, jest a little while ago. Right after the rain." She seemed a little frightened by his strange reaction. "You must a met her on the road if you come through Watauga."

Hugh Brownlow's eyes were dark and troubled as he turned away and went into the woodlot to think. How could it be that Granny Hackle came to stop the bleeding of Sally while at the very same time she lay dying in her own log cabin, with Hugh by her side?

It was a question for which Hugh could never find a right answer, and the telling of the story at last gave rise to the belief that Granny Hackle had indeed been a witch. How else could one explain her strange life and even stranger ending?

Many years have come and gone since the Old Medicine Woman died, but people in and about Watauga even to this day call the limestone ridge on which she was buried, The Granny

Hackle". There are some who say that the wind, sweeping through the gap where Granny's Cabin stood, sometimes sounds like music, or a distant choir singing, or, as Hugh Brownlow said like an organ playing.

END

This recording was made by Jesse Larrimore "Larry" Campbell, ca. 1985, when Larry was about 70 years old. It was made at the request of his daughter, Lori Campbell Amos, and it therefore was not meant to be heard by anyone else. Larry speaks to her during the recording, and he speaks of "your mother," etc.

Larry was born October 9, 1915, in Ravenscroft, White County, TN, near the town of Crossville. He was the 4th son of James Lane Campbell and Lillie Jane Green, both of Coffee County, TN. When Larry was only about 2 years old, the family moved to Kentucky after James found work in a coal mine there.

The Campbells lived first in Fleming, Letcher County, Kentucky. It was here that the Campbells and Zillions became friends. The family of Pete Zillon that Larry mentions in the recording was Livonian, a Latvian ethnic group, although they were mistakenly recorded on the 1920 Federal Census as Lithuanian.

The family moved several times, and eventually ended up living in both Anco and Vicco, Knott County, Kentucky. The recording mentions that the family was forced to move after James was fired one of these times because they were vocal Democrats; other firings occurred for various reasons. James always found work in another coal mine, however, and the family was able to survive.

Larry's daughter, Susan Campbell Rhodes, remembers that he and her mother often had friendly arguments over which of them had grown up more poor. Larry always won when he brought up the fact that as a child he never had a vegetable during the winter. Although the Campbell family was poor, the children were happy, and Larry mentions in the recording that the children never knew they were poor. He describes also his first trip to his parents' home in Manchester, Coffee County, TN, and how he saw a player piano, a two-story house, etc. for the first time while he was there.

James was killed in a mine in 1929, when Larry was 13 years old. The family returned to Manchester to bury James, but they apparently returned to Knott County for at least another year; Lillie Campbell is listed as head of household on the 1930 Federal Census for Knott County. The oldest son, James Edward, was not living with the family at this time, but the second son, Redus, was listed as a coal miner. It is thought that perhaps the family owed money to the coal company when James died, and that Redus helped to pay off the debt after his death; this is speculation, however, as the family may have just wanted to try to stay on in Kentucky because they had come to see it as their home. Larry never mentioned why the family returned; it was only when the 1930 Federal Census was made available (in 2003) that his daughter made the discovery that the family was still in Kentucky that year.

By 1931, however, the family moved to Manchester permanently. Among the more memorable things he speaks of in the recording is the different ways the mentally ill were treated in the mining camps and in the "big city of Manchester." In the camps, he says, the afflicted were taken care of by the community, but in Manchester, he saw people

make fun of a mentally ill person for the first time. Such differences were difficult for Larry in the beginning, but he eventually settled into life on the Highland Rim.

After finishing high school, he served in the Army Air Corps and the Navy during World War II, and he served in the Air Force during the Korean Conflict, and then served in the National Guard. He married Lucie Lovell during the 1940's, but she died after only a few years of marriage. In May of 1949, he married Leona B. Ramsey, daughter of Hence Burris Ramsey of Coffee County, TN, and Sally Alma St. John of Warren County, TN. Their daughters, Susan and Lori, were born in 1950 and 1957, respectively. Larry worked for the US Postal Service during most of this time, and in 1968, he was appointed Post Master of Manchester by the US Senate. He later retired and lived the remainder of his life in Manchester, traveling occasionally to points of interest regarding his Scottish and Native American heritage, of which he was very proud.

When he was 79 years old, after nearly 70 years of smoking, he found the courage to quit. He told his granddaughter, Heather Rhodes Johnson, that it was the hardest thing he had ever done, and he thought about it every day. He never smoked again, though, but he quit too late to save his health. At the age of 80, he discovered he had lung cancer and began treatment. He died on January 19, 1997, at the age of 81. He rests today beside his wife, Leona, in Rose Hill Cemetery in Coffee County.

Those who knew him remember most his kindness and his laughter, both of which he shared freely. He never looked down on anyone, and he had many friends of all social classes and ethnic groups. He was loved and respected by many because of the kind of man he was, which was surely in no small part shaped by his childhood spent in the coal mines of Eastern Kentucky.

- Heather Rhodes Johnson
August 4, 2008
Johnson City, TN