

from
Cecil Race → NOV 11 1988
Sir Cedar Bluff VA 24609
Box 290-C - RFD-177

I am sending you
a complete story of Chap Osborne The Law
man of the Early part of the century
of Laven, VA.

Sending also some pictures,
and some notes.

There'll be no need to return
what you cannot use.

I'll be sending more on the
Altizer - Whittaker # TAZEWELL County
Feud of the first part of the century
in a few wks.

I am sending the names of three old
people that remember the Feud, well

But the only way you can get any
information out of the is to know how
to ask the questions. You mention a name
of something that happened in 1925 or 30
and they will tell all about it.

NOAH ALTIZER Valls Creek WVA. - 1304 875 3572
CLARENCE Helbert - 1304 875 3464 - WVA

Ulyses Bandy - Bandy VA. - 1703 964 9284

The reason I am sending the names,

I welcome all the help I can get
you might call them.

They all had Kenfolds killed, (Some of the events they
won't talk about)



8 B - Wednesday, February 24, 1988

one of the Greatest men to
Come out of TAZEWELL
County
By Cecil Rose

Tazewell County: Our Legacy

Brother Sheffey

Circuit-riding preacher fights peoples' wild ways

By Gaynelle R. Thompson

Being a citizen of Tazewell County is a proud heritage for the majority of those persons born and reared here. However, certain recorded incidents cast a blemish on our peaceful and law-abiding reputation. We cannot always boast of our low crime rate and church-going image.

Brother Robert Sayers Sheffey, the famous circuit-riding Methodist preacher, was extremely aware of the lewdness which existed in the late 1800's. Jess Carr characterized the adverse disposition through Sheffey's eyes in his *Saint of the Wilderness*. He describes the area in this manner: "...the county is blooming with new riches and the people have become ungodly and wild in their ways. Half of the county has become drunken with prosperity. The tavern replaces the church."

Others have written of the excessive number of saloons in Richlands when the town was young. The late Dosca Draper listed the number of places doing business with strong drink at nine. Historian R. L. Crawford also verified and located these "stores of strong spirits."

Mr. Crawford also wrote that men came into Richlands "with their pistols hanging to their sides." On some occasions they would "ride mules right up the board walk, bow heads down and ride right into a saloon. ...everybody would rush out the back door. Officers would come and take the riders out the door."

During the time Sheffey spent in Richlands conducting a revival in 1898, Carr elaborates on conditions that were unfavorable. "As he rode through the town, he felt a strong sense of rampant gaiety that obviously pervaded the area. Voices were frequently at high pitch. The staggering form of a drunk man was seen more than a dozen times."

One of the incidents involving a "house of ill-repute," located in Richlands, has its funny side. The story is related in this fashion. Sheffey was looking over the town

where "boisterous male voices alternated with high pitched laughter." When he inquired as to what business was housed within, he was enlightened. Having noticed a hornet's nest in an earlier encounter with three youths, he decided to take action in his own way to interrupt "the business." He then approached the youths and hired their services. When the hornet's nest was retrieved, he went to an open window in the house of prostitution and threw the "burden" inside, pulled down the window, and let the hornets take care of the rest. Needless to say, as he retreated, loud agonizing screams reached his ears and the house was soon emptied.

Early Richlands records verify the need for constables, special policemen, jails or "calabooses," purchasing of balls and chains, and steel hammers for prison labor. Also mentioned is the borrowing of guns to protect the peace. One can read between the lines to discover all was not well in our fair town.

The legend of Brother Sheffey is proudly remembered by Richlands area pioneers, as well as throughout all parts of Southwest Virginia where he traveled. Many stories have circulated concerning his ministry to the area - most noted concerns his lengthy prayers. He was known to bring out his sheepskin and bow down for prayer at any given moment. It is said that he prayed for specific things and, not only were his prayers not in vain, but for whatever he asked the Lord, he, in some way or another, always seemed to receive. People believed that if he asked the Lord to show forth his wrath on them, it would be done.

Sheffey was an arch enemy of the liquor traffic, and the destruction of stills was a frequent subject of his prayers. It seems he did not simply ask the Lord to destroy these places, but also suggested the method to be used in many cases. It was thought that he would first study the situation and decide what was the most feasible means for destruction and allow it to happen through

Another Sheffey story which cannot be verified, but makes for interesting reading goes like this. During one of his visits to Richlands, a young man let it be known that he intended to vote "wet." Supposedly, Brother Sheffey publically prayed that the Lord would let him live but do something to stop him from voting for liquor.

The next day, while the man was cutting timber, an accident occurred which incapacitated him for a period of time. The young fellow, thinking he was going to die from his injuries, then prayed that he might be spared long enough so that he could vote "dry" in the election. As the story goes, he did recover and cast a vote in a close election.

"Bootlegging and moonshining" existed all around the territory and many incidents of crime were related to it. The stories about a former one-armed Tazewell County lawman, Chap Osborne, seemed to always be connected to this illegal practice. Osborne's ancestors have recited his part in covering for those involved and his dislike for "revenue men."

Each of the anecdotes showing the "wilder side" of Richlands and the surrounding area has contributed to the stature of the county. However, there is still another that brought about a greater impact - that of the lynchings of 1893. The newspaper account of events which led up to the hangings read in this manner.

The Clinch Valley Division of the Norfolk and Western Railroad had not been completed and the method of trading for residents of Buchanan and Tazewell County was by use of wagons drawn by horses and mules. It was during one of these drayages that two Buchanan County men, Benjamin Shortridge and Alexander Ratliff, displayed a large sum of money in a saloon in Richlands. When they left the tavern late on the evening of January 30, they were waylaid, beaten senseless, robbed, and placed on the railroad tracks. Supposedly, those involved were hoping the morning train would cover up the crime. However, the

arrived. The local authorities were notified and news spread of the atrocity. Investigation revealed that the men involved had been present when Ratliff and Shortridge exhibited the money.

When word of the events reached home, a lynch mob was immediately formed to bring the criminals to justice. Richlands lawmen were overpowered eventually and within 24 hours, five black men had been lynched to avenge the outrageous act.

Shortridge died a few days later, and Ratliff family members state that Alexander Ratliff suffered brain damage as a result of the incident. Newspaper accounts of the story defended the action on the basis of evidence and incrimination of some of those involved. Still, the scars remain.

Many other stories of lynching, murders, bootlegging, etc. have been printed. While our area has much of which to be proud, tales of this nature serve as a reminder that all localities are susceptible to human weaknesses. Such is history.

Bluefield, VA originally went by the name Pinhook. When the first post office was opened in 1880 it was called Harman. Bluefield, VA is older than its sister city on the West Virginia side.



Brother Robert Sayers Sheffey



NAPA

AUTO PARTS

Look for your nearest auto care dealer




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MACHINE
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SERVICE



Letter and
Deed

also in side
Picture of Bro. Schaffy
He died in 1903

By Cecil Rose
Cedar Bluff VA

man