

CLIPPINGS FROM THE BILLTOWN WHIZZER

Ruminations of the Slicker Snake

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There once existed, many years ago, an imaginary village along the reaches of the upper Cumberland River, by the name of YUBY (that's spelled "Yuby"), full name Yuby Dam, USA. In this village, strangely enough, there were small-scale happenings which paralleled activities, largely political in nature, of national scope and interest, a sort of microcosm of imitative ferment and restless activity.

Sometimes the lawlessness of the misguided citizenry in Yuby Dam sorely taxed the enforcement abilities of the ninety-eight year old sheriff, who bore the name of Billy Hell. The frequent brawls produced large numbers of broken and bleeding customers for the resident physicians, by names Dr. Deadner, Dr. Butcher and Dr. Killemquick. And, of course, the ensuing litigation took place in the courts of Judge Wise and Judge Broadhead.

Time and space do not permit the complete listing of the diverse citizenry, which also included such characters as Shimmytale Thompson, Barefoot Owens, and the Slicker Snake himself, mayor of Yuby Dam, and editor and publisher of the Billtown Whizzer.

The Slicker Snake was none other than my grandmother Draper's brother, Hugh Lawson Huffines, who taught school all his life and, when the spirit moved him, wrote columns for

the Jackson County Sentinel at Gainsboro, Tennessee, and the Carthage Courier, at Carthage, Tennessee.

Uncle Hugh, alias the Slicker Snake, had the opportunity to write a syndicated column but refused the honor and the money. He simply didn't want the obligation of meeting deadlines. Too, he didn't need the money anyway, for he was a bachelor and his tastes were Spartan: a rented, furnished room, one meal a day and a few cups of hot water were sufficient for him. When I became acquainted with him in the late 30s and early 40s, his diet had produced an almost skeletal appearance, but his immense zest for life and his lively mentality were unimpaired. His pleasures in life were teaching, reading, and, when he felt like it, reaching into the recesses of his fertile imagination and writing his occasional column.

When Uncle Hugh was writing, early in the century, the Columbia University library subscribed to the Jackson County Sentinel just to get and enjoy his sporadic episodes.

To get something of the flavor of his writing, in most cases it is necessary to preface each quoted column or excerpt with a brief account of the real events of the time which provoked the writing, and were mirrored in the subsequent unrest and antics of the Yuby Dam residents.

In the little poem of advice following, no such preface is necessary.

"YUBY DAM U. S. A.

(By Request)

Leap Year Is the Girl's Year

Leap year is the girl's year.

Springtime is love's time

Leap year and mating time are here, and

'Tis said to be the girl's time

To step up into the front line, and

Do all the trying, and try to make a catch.

So, now my little blue eyed witch

The thing to do is plunge and pitch

Try it a bit, with grace and grit

And see what you can get out of it. For

The Way is now open.

'Tis leap year, my dear

Phone him up, look him up, round him up

Head him off at the post office and the store

more and more,

Go to the bat

Cross his path like a black cat

Step across.

For we all know and well understand that
This is the way to cabbage on a man
Go out good and stout and
Make his life a misery for
Man doesn't know, and man's too slow
He's too all-fired stupid
Dilly-dallying around with Cupid
Man's as slow as Christmas.
He pokes about and in and out
He's a sight.
He will neither nibble nor bite
It's not a bit right, so
Grab your gig and gig him.

This old timey stuff
I've heard it enough
About it's taking two to make a match, and
Waiting for a man to make the catch. So
grab him, nab him little Miss
Or you will make a miss.
Man has tarried, and tarried, and tarried
Until it's high time you were all getting married
And I know it.
He has fooled around, and fooled around
Until you have a right to run him down
And you know it.

He has slowed about and slowed about until

You ought to stop it.

If he won't "pop" the question,

Then you "pop" it.

You have this right and I know it

My little Dear

Leap year or no leap year

And may heaven smile upon you."

It was characteristic of the Slicker Snake to have internal rhyming even in his prose compositions, so the above may originally have been written as prose. My mother, in compiling the articles, perhaps took the liberty to stretch this out and punctuate it as a poem. As both Mother and the Slicker Snake are gone, I won't ever know.

The following column was written shortly after election time, and is the obituary of J. B. Lubberboy. The heading is "YUBY DAM U. S. A., J. B. Lubberboy", and goes as follows:

"J. B. Lubberboy, 113, a Whizzer office spittoon carrier, died in Yuby Dam yesterday of gunshot wounds that he received in a fight here on election day.

Lubberboy was shot in a general fight at the primary, in which several others were killed and wounded in a political brawl. He was shot just as a boodler was leading him up to the ballot box to vote him.

This is indeed bad and sad, and will hurt the good name of Yuby Dam, for a citizen to be killed in a political fight, exercising the blood bought privilege of suffrage. Men should be better protected at the primary, so they can vote their sentiments, and exercise this great American liberty and get their dollar in peace.

Everything was done for him that medical science could do. Drs. Deadner, Killemquick and Butcher stayed at his bedside, but he did not rally.

This place has suffered a great loss at his death, and it's generally believed that he'll be missed. Lubberboy's life shows what any boy can do. He came right up from the bottom. He was born poor in a log cabin in Yuby Dam. Born on a credit. His parents were not able to pay the doctor for his birth; so he had to start in life with a debt that he'd made hanging over his head, which is always a handicap. But in spite of all this he forged ahead. He has had a spectacular rise. He has been promoted on up and up until, at his death, he was the spittoon carrier for Billy Hell and me at the Whizzer office.

He has held places of great honor; positions that required talent and skill. Back several years ago when I was so old and weak that I could hardly go, he carried my walking cane for me, helped me open my encyclopedia, wound my watch and struck matches for me, and many such things that I was

too weak to do.

He was bottle cap jerker and stopper puller in Billy Hell's still at this place for several years. It is said that he could jerk off more bottle caps, pull out more stoppers, and serve more thirsty folks and thereby, do a greater good for a greater number of fallen humanity in the same length of time than any other worker in the still.

He's gone and maybe a goner. His place will be hard to fill. He's left several brothers and sisters at this place. He also left me, and others that I could mention.

I've requested to say a few words over his remains at the burial. I intend to give him a boost at these services. I feel that I owe him a lift in his funeral. I'll make a vain attempt to twist Holy Writ to where I can step him up Jacob's ladder, with his lamp in his hand, trimmed and burning.

Billy Hell will also say a few words in a harangue way at the services. Funeral tomorrow in Lower Yuby Dam at 3 P. M. Peace to his ashes!

THE SAD SLICKER SNAKE

Clipping from Billtown Whizzer

P. S. James Killjoy, my comforter, is by my side. He comforts me by saying that maybe Lubberboy is at rest, and maybe not. And the hearse will be on time for the rest of us. I'm so thankful for a comforter."

When the nation underwent the agony of bank failures, in 1930, Uncle Hugh dutifully followed the chaotic national pattern in his own imaginary district, which suffered similar painful bank failures in both Yuby Dam and Fiddlers Green.

In a column headed "Yuby Dam U. S. A., and titled "A Bank Crash in Yuby Dam," the woes and anger of the citizens were set forth:

"There has been great excitement on the streets of this city for a week. The McNabber Bank shut its doors here last week, and twelve of its branch banks in Fiddlers Green also bursted instantly, just like so many soap bubbles, with liabilities of \$553,000.00 and assets \$13.00 - \$13.00 cash, and some stocks.

These banks had all of the Yuby Dam road, school, church, and hospital funds in them.

I have already stopped all road work, dismissed Prof. J. B. Wedgehead from the school, phoned little Sammy Crow, the Yuby Dam parson, to vacate his pulpit, and I have shut down the hospitals; and it now looks like the affairs of this city are drifting rapidly toward Gehenna.

Old Billy Hell has organized a mob. He and fifty other desperados from Bluecut Ruin are walking the streets, thirsting for the blood of the alleged bank wreckers. I can hardly restrain him. I told him to stay his hand, not to kill too quickly, until we find the guilty parties. I told him that it was better to let the ninety-nine guilty escape

rather than kill an innocent man. Not to act too rash and bring shame on one fair name in Yuby Dam. I said, 'Let them have their day in court.' Maybe I can hold him down.

We can hardly know the cause of this colossal calamity, but it is commonly reported and generally believed here that it lays at the door of Calamity Coats, a man who was acting in my place as Mayor pro tem of Yuby Dam, while I was sick with the 'black tongue' for eight months.

Some think that he was thirsting for political power, tied up with McNabber, his political henchman, and without law or gospel, put all of the public money in the McNabber Bank without the proper security or safeguards.

It is not certainly known yet whether these gentlemen have conspired to do a wrong thing, and I have advised caution until I can make an investigation.

These are certainly times that try men's souls.

Old Billy Hell is walking the streets with his gang tearing his hair and cursing, bent on murder and I have put the left wing of my body guard of eight hundred men, commanded by Shimmytale Thompson around Calamity's dwelling.

And I have thrown out a drag net and I am fixing to have a sweeping investigation; and I will leave no stone unturned in an attempt to run the guilty to earth.

Given under my hand and seal in Yuby Dam.

This is the 15th day of Dec. A. D. 1930

The Mayor of Yuby Dam

Clipping from Billtown Whizzer:

P. S. Just as we go to press we hear that two of the branch bank presidents in Fiddlers Green have made their own quietus. Little Goosy McGong took calcium carbolate of strychnine and died in spite of the efforts of Dr. Pukewell, who gave him a strong emetic that made him throw up his heels; and he also used a stomach pump on Goosy, but all in vain.

Also, little Billy McGee, another bank president, swallowed a dynamite, with lighted fuse, that exploded and all that has been found of him up to date is the ball of his left heel.

While I sit here under the sword of Damocles, I have but one joy left. James Killjoy, my comforter, is yet with me. He comforted me very much just now by saying, 'Maybe it will, and maybe it won't.' Oh, what a joy I find in James Killjoy, my comforter."

In February of 1932 the Slicker Snake foresaw the coming necessity of containing Japan, then on a rampage of aggression, and predicted in his column that our country would be forced to go to war with them. The following is his

column of that date.

"YUBY DAM U. S. A.

SOME JAPAN STUFF

Get your goggles you Whizzers readers. I am spreading ink again. So get your goggles and get me. I am shooting down the goose quill, shooting it down telling you about it, telling you about this little old Japan.

I am brimful of this gossipy Japanese stuff, sloshing over. Take it from me then and go tell the world. Japan is on her way to Doom's day. Japan is so chug full of little slant eyed yellow devils that she is obliged to swarm. Running over full, starving full. Thick as ants, thick as fiddlers in hell.

Their rice won't go round. Their chop sticks won't work. They can't get enough. They have to swarm. They are coming out with guns in their hand fixing to seize the whole eastern rim of this broad land. They already have their bloody nippers on Manchuria, and a deathlike grip on Korea; and are now sticking their bloody talons into China proper, and not long hence they'll walk down and write their name in the Phillipine Islands, unless they're halted. If they don't stop, they'll have to be stopped. These little Mongolian devils. Trade, territory, traffic and trouble are what they are after. And believe me, McGinty, trouble they'll have, trouble thick and plenty. Thick as butter on country bread.

Their plans are made and laid and they've gone a gunning for this rich juicy Chinese trade. They are going to gobble it all. But they had better go slow. They ought to know that it's open door in China.

'Old Uncle Sam' is a mighty good man, but he is not going to stand for this. He is going to get mad, and he's going to get bad, so they had better stop and I know they had or he'll stop them good and proper.

He is going to get awful mad and awful bad and awful sore when they slam the open door: he'll shoot it off the hinges and I know he will. I know his history. It's either open door in China or open graves in Japan. So take it from me and go tell the world.

THE GOSSIPY SLICKER SNAKE

Clipping from the Bill-town Whizzer

P. S. James Killjoy, my comforter, is yet with me. He comforts me by saying maybe she'll stop. Oh! What a joy I have in James Killjoy!"

In the next selection, dated August 13, 1938, people in Jackson and Smith counties were anxiously awaiting the promised rural electrification and, naturally, the Slicker Snake was compelled to have his say. So, in a column headlined "YUBY Dam U. S. A.", and titled "The Yuby Dam Country Folks Will Get The TVA Juice," he wrote in typical fashion:

"Looks like now that it won't be long until country folks will be shooting on the TVA lights. That will be wonderfully fine, and I know it. Light is so nice and necessary to have.

We have always had some light. Several years ago, the Lord made the world and hung up the sun, moon and stars in the sky and said, 'Let there be light,' and we've had more or less light ever since, but we've never had enough of the stuff. Of course, in day time, the sun does a pretty good job of it; but like some little girl said, it shines in daytime when we don't need it, and the moonlight, at the best, is poor light at night. It's kinda dim, most too thin, comes and goes too much, news and olds out and in. Moonlight is not a bit satisfactory.

Folks have hung about in dark moonlight spots, and killed, stole, and kissed other folk' folks, till it's a shame. It's just too awful and we all know it.

We certainly need a little more light at night. Enough, at least, to drive away the ghosts, boogers, witches and such like, and stop them from necking about in the way.

The old timey lights ought to go. We need a better, brighter light. Folks groped about in the dark for at least a thousand-one years with a torch in their hands, skinning their shins, and singeing off their eyebrows. Little grease lamps and whale oil lamps sat about on the earth and

sputtered, spumed and fluttered like the devil. Kerosene lamps have stunk an awful sight, trying to light up the night. Candles, pine knots and what-nots have flickered, flared and done their best, but they've not stood the test. Just a little puff of wind, out they go, and the world's as black as a stack of black cats.

All such lightning bug stuff has got to go, and will go and I know it.

Lights and power will come. Electricity is the stuff that lights and fans your room, heats your bath room, irons your clothes, milks your cow, makes your ice, cooks your food, heats your toes and warms your nose. Nothing better, God knows.

Nothing like it. Makes life more comfortable and easier. Lightens our burdens. It will be great for our women folks. Poor woman is over burdened. Her work never ends. Like the poet says,

Man's work is from sun to sun,

But Woman's work is never done.

We are killing our women folks. Let's save them. Why, oh why, should we kill them?

And again, I say, why over burden and kill our women folks? Let's don't kill our women.

Let's wire our homes, turn on the juice and let it work and save our women. I do hope the TVA comes our way.

THE POWER AND LIGHT TALKING SLICKER SNAKE

Clipping from Billtown Whizzer

P. S. James Killjoy, my comforter, is with me. He comforts me by saying that we'll have electricity and the women will be saved.

Billy Hell says that a great big sprinkle of the women ought to be put in the 'chair' and the juice turned on. He favors electricity for the women that way."

Acquaintances of Uncle Hugh still enjoy talking about him, and one story I heard not too long ago from a cousin in Carthage had to do with the pleasure Uncle Hugh took in entertaining the Smith County court house crowd. It seems that one day the Slicker started in the morning rather early, and took as his topic the Irish potato, an innocent enough subject. The cousin reported that the Slicker talked all day long on this same subject, and never repeated himself a single time. The timing for this marathon effort may have been somewhere close to June of 1935, for he wrote the following column then.

"YUBY DAM U. S. A.

PONE, PEACE, PLENTY AND IRISH POTATOES

Of course nobody is satisfied, but we have nothing to grumble about. We already have pone, peace, plenty and potatoes all over this fruitful land, and no one need go hungry.

Any common ordinary sinner, however poor, can by a little exertion, stuff himself as full every day as a hungry hound-dog at a hog killing. Things never looked better for the future. Orchard, field and garden are hanging full of tomorrows eatables, holding out to us the glorious promises of another bountiful harvest. Hog and hominy for another year, and enough to spare.

It certainly is fair enough in my kingdom. Chickens by the thousands walking around, nearly large enough to eat. More than the Methodist preachers have to say grace over. Enough for all the other church folks to get a share if they jump in and beat them to it. It won't be long now until it will be wring off their necks, jerk off the feathers and go to it. Everyone should get his share, not look around, not care, fork in, fork out, doesn't matter who is about.

And new Irish potatoes and new peas, if you please, are already gracing the tables of the Yuby Dam people. And while speaking of the Irish potato, let me say this of the Irish potato: Of all the delicious eatables that the good Lord dishes out to this greedy, unthankful world, there is nothing better than the Irish potato. It stands at the very head.

'Tis good and tasty enough for any man, be he king or clown, prince or pauper, high or low, smart or slow. It fits into the poor man's life like a charm. If he has no bread or meat, he can still eat if he has the Irish potato. If he has no stove he can jerk it from the toaster, and have a toast

fit for the tooth of a king. And any poor devil can have the Irish potato.

True enough, 'tis common and coarse, rough and ugly, humble and lowly, but it gets there just the same. The restaurant and hotel folks are wild about it. The housewife can't do without it. There is no one above it and everybody loves it. This mild-eyed tuber.

It's not good enough for pie, but better than pit. It's too coarse for jelly and jam, but finer than jelly and jam. Too rough for sugar, but perfect with salt.

I hope that you have a patch of this thousand-eyed Irishman. You're sorrier than 'old scratch' if you don't have a patch for your wife and children.

But I've given you enough of this Irish potato stuff. So, all hats off to the thousand-eyed Irishman, the great American 'spud'.

'Tis rich and good enough for any man's blood.

THE POTATO EATING SLICKER SNAKE"

I hope you will forgive me for delivering a paper based on my great uncle Hugh. This would not have happened had my Mother not gone into the archives about twenty years ago and copied a sampling of his yellowed and crumbling articles, or had I not known him personally in his old age, and heard him relate some of his implausible and outrageous tales, all of them delivered with a straight face. His tongue seemed

always firmly planted in his cheek, and only the twinkle in his eye gave him away.

He was a gentle man. I remember him with affection and esteem. In Jackson, Smith and Trousdale counties the very mention of his name still brings a smile to faces of the elderly, as it did back in the days when he produced his columns, back when they would ask each other "And what did the old Slicker Snake have to say this week?"

His talent, in retrospect, might be considered dubious, and his audience and fame were essentially local. Still, his ability to entertain and amuse, and simultaneously call attention with a broad comic hyperbolic brush of ridicule to themes and events national and international, to focus them all in an imaginary town peopled by imaginary people, was unique.

Now, fifty years after his demise, I can confidently assure you that James Killjoy was correct, when he comforted the Slicker Snake by telling him "Cheer up! No need sighing. The hearse will be in on time." It was, along with a host of his friends, . I salute his memory in his own words, for this is the way he would have said it:

"Peace to his ashes!"