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Legends of Drakes Creek
Warren County, Kentucky
"Old Flutey"
by
Harry Lucellus Jackson

Back in the closing days of the Nineteenth Century and the beginning of the Twentieth my mother and father settled their growing family on a large tract of land adjoining the west bank of Drakes Creek which had formerly belonged to my father's great uncle and aunt, Dennis Skaggs and his wife Allie Barnett Skaggs. This property had been in the family since the Revolutionary War. The house in which we lived at the beginning of their occupation was a two-story log structure consisting of two large rooms on the ground floor, each containing a large stone fireplace placed back-to-back in the wall separating the rooms. There was a single door and window in each room allowing for air and light and exit and egress. The upper loft was reached by a crude stairway almost perpendicular. It was there where the boys slept and in this log house where most of us were born. The front room was the parlor and bedroom combined, and was connected to the main or family room by a doorway opening alongside of the fireplace. The kitchen was a log leanto affair which opened off the rear of the family room. In later years my father hired Mr. Bonham, a well-known carpenter and builder, to build and enlarge the old house, incorporating the log family room part of the structure in the new building which became the dining room. He retained the old stone fireplaces. The new house was in the modified Queen Anne style with dormer windows and a large L-shaped veranda running across the front and at right angle to the main structure which was supported by a number

of white Doric columns. The interior of the house was separated by a long hallway broken by a bannistered balcony and stairwell. The hallway ran from the front entrance off the veranda to the back screened-in porch. It was on this back screened-in porch where the family ate all our meals in the summer and for most of the years when the weather permitted. The kitchen opened off one end of that porch, making it convenient for serving meals.

The back porch became the living quarters for the family. My mother had an old Negro woman servant, formerly a slave, by the name of "Old Aunt Mary Tony." She was the family factotem and jack-of-all-trades. She cooked, helped with all the laundry, and acted as referee in the sibling squabbles. My father had installed setaline gas lights throughout the house which we seldom used except for parties and when visitors came. Instead, we continued to use coal-oil lamps, which gave a wierd flickering light in the erie darkness.

The house and yard were surrounded by a white palling fence with a gate opening into the drive through the wooded lot running from the house to the junction of the Dyes Ford Road and ^{Lem} ~~Don~~ Howell Road. The house and yard were situated on a knoll rising in the wooded lot, giving it a commanding view of the approach from either road. The main access to the homeplace was over a series of roller coaster hills about a mile in length on the Lem Howell Road which tied into the old Plano-Skaggs Mill Road. It was at this junction where our mailbox was situated.

In the evening after supper, the family would gather on the back porch to talk over the events of the day. Sometimes Aunt Mary Tony would tell us about the Civil War and her slave days. She had been owned by the Coleman family.

At night, when the family would be resting from our daily chores or studying lessons on the back porch, it would be at these times when Old Flutey would holloo at the front gate and throw the entire household into excitement, turmoil, and confusion.

Old Flutey was a drunken near-do-well who roamed the countryside, always at night, robbing and stealing and scaring the wits out of the womenfolk living along the banks of Drakes Creek from Old Drake to Alvaton. It was rumored throughout the neighborhood that he lived in one of the numerous caves which opened up along the course of the creek. There were other rumors that he lived in an old log hut over on the back of Mr. Brad Neely's farm. To tell the truth, no one knew exactly where he lived. When Mr. Kerry Kelly's barn was found to be in flames on a cold February morning, it was said the fire was set by Old Flutey who had been sleeping in the hayloft and set the fire to get warm. The fire killed two of Mr. Kelly's brood mares and a team of handsome mules. I remember going over there with my brothers from our farm, which adjoined the Kelly place, as soon as we saw the illumination in the sky before daybreak. It was a sad sight to behold--with cows, horses, and mules being consumed by the flames. Jim Henry, Mr. Kelly's son, told us he had been able to save a couple of the horses. We stayed until the structure collapsed. The whole neighborhood had assembled to watch the conflagration. Old Flutey

was not to be found in the community. There were large footprints in the mud and snow which led people to believe it was the work of Old Flutey.

People in our area around Plano and Massey's Mill would try to describe what Old Flutey looked like. Invariably they could not give an accurate description of him because he always appeared at night and in the darkness it was difficult to tell just what he did look like. The best description we had of him was given by one of our neighbor women, Mrs. Jones, who lived alone on a hill above our place, just off the Dyes Ford Road. She had been visiting Mrs. Bess Isabell, a friend, one night who lived down the road a piece. When she left home she left a lamp burning in her kitchen so it would not be dark in the house when she arrived home. She had unharnessed her mare from the buggy and after feeding the animal was on her way to the house when she noticed the shadow of a man's form as he passed in front of her kitchen window. She stealthily approached the outside of the window to see who it was and what he was doing in her kitchen. She was half frightened to death to discover that it was none other than Old Flutey in a drunken state helping himself to the food she had left in her kitchen safe. She watched him intently for about fifteen minutes while trying to figure out what to do to get rid of him. She ruled out confronting him head-on for fear he would attack her or set the house on fire. She finally concluded her best plan was to arm herself with a pitchfork, the only weapon at hand, which she picked up back at the stables and started singing and talking in a loud voice as if some man was with her and by

that ruse scare him out of the house. Well, the ruse worked. Old Flutey took to the woods in a hurry, but not before Mrs. Jones had gotten a good description of him. She told my mother the next day about the fright she had gotten and gave the most complete description of him. She said he looked to be about forty-five or fifty years old, of medium height but rather stocky and powerfully built. His face was covered with a matted beard separated by a large red bulbous nose. His eyes were bloodshot and somewhat protuding under heavy lids, giving him a leering appearance. He wore old heavy Brogan boots with loose laces, and his clothes were in tatters. He did not wear a shirt, instead he had on an old sweater opened at the neck, revealing a mass of hair on his chest and up around his neck. He carried a gunnysack in which he stored his foodstuff or chickens or whatever he could lay hands on in the way of liquor or edibles.

Mrs. Jones had been warned by her friend Bess Isabell that Old Flutey was in the neighborhood, for she had seen him pass her place just about dusk going down the Dyes Ford Road with a gunnysack slung over his shoulder. This gunnysack came to be Old Flutey's trademark. He was seldom seen without it.

There was great excitement at Old Union Church one Sunday, especially among the women, for the night before Old Flutey had suddenly appeared at the Cal Merritt place and finding Mrs. Merritt at home alone had attacked her and abused her with the most vile language. The only thing that saved her was the sound of a wagon and team coming down the Woodburn Pike. Old Flutey got frightened

and fled the scene, taking with him a freshly baked ham. All the women at church were warned to keep their house doors locked when home alone and have some kind of weapon close at hand, in case of need.

It was late one summer evening when Old Flutey appeared at our front gate. My father was away electioneering at the time. Old Flutey halloed at the gate and my mother, almost frozen with fear, answered him from inside the screen door of the back porch. Old Flutey asked if my father was home. Mother being there alone with four small children was afraid to tell him my father was not at home and told him, "Yes, he's down at the barn," wherewith the drunken old man went stumbling off down towards the barn. Meanwhile, my mother gathered her brood and fled the premises, half running and dragging her youngsters across the back field to our nearest neighbors, Mr. Henry Harmon's place. When we arrived Mr. Harmon and his family were at supper. After Mother had told of her fright and Mr. Harmon had finished his supper, he came back with us to our house. Old Flutey was waiting for us when we returned, angry as a charging bull because mother had lied to him. About this time we heard my father returning home in his buckboard hitched to one of our mares, named Old Nell. Old Flutey faded away into the darkness. Needless to say, we spent a sleepless night that night. Father was very much annoyed with us ~~all~~ for letting it keep us from our sleep ~~that night~~. We always remembered Mr. Harmon with affection and gratitude for having come to our ~~aid~~ ~~rescue~~.

It was not long after that episode that we learned that Old Flutey was dead. For several days it had been noticed, by Mr. Will

and Miss Carrie Blackburn, who lived on a farm across the Plano-Masseys Mill Road at the junctions of the lane leading to our place, that a flock of buzzards had been circling high above an old sinkhole on the back part of the old Matlock place. Mr. Blackburn and one of the Mercer boys, his nephew, went over to investigate what was attracting the buzzards. They found the remains of Old Flutey, who apparently had been dead for several days, lying in the bottom of the sinkhole where he had fallen in his drunken stupor and broke his neck. He had been stealing chickens for his gunnysack was full of half-starved chickens.

Well, with this news the neighborhood breathed a sigh of relief. At last we were rid of this neighborhood menace--but alas! We reckoned too soon. Things of the weirdest and most uncanny nature began to happen throughout the community. On many occasions on moonlit nights people would see the dark silhouette of Old Flutey with his gunnysack on his back stalking across the top of a ridge or they would hear him halooning across the valley on a quiet and lonely night, apparently searching for his cave. Some nights we would be awakened by the howling of Mr. Harmon's hounds when the moon would be slightly veiled by the clouds. We would always say Old Flutey was out roaming the night. People said on many nights when passing along the road next to the sinkhole they would hear a low moaning sound originating from out of that place with the mist and fog.

The year my family moved from the farm, I think it was the summer of 1918 during World War I, to Bowling Green where my three

older brothers were in school attending Ogden College, I was left on the upper farm, known as the Cooksey Place, to tend the stock until our tenants moved in. The house in which I was staying was a two-room affair constructed of logs with a dog-trot separating the rooms. It had outlived three generations of Cookseys and several generations of subsequent owners. At the time I speak of I had just completed the spring session of school at Old Union and in the fall would enter the Center Street Grade School in Bowling Green. I was then eleven years old. My chores consisted of feeding the horses and turning the cows out to pasture. I was to be there for a period of only ten days until the Crawford family moved and would take over my duties. This was some months after Old Flutey was found dead in the sinkhole located less than a mile away.

One night as I lay sleeping alone in the back room of the old house I was suddenly awakened by something at the foot of my bed slowing pulling the covers from off of me. I sat upright and grabbed the covers which resulted in a tug of war between whatever it was tugging at the foot of the bed and myself. Suddenly it let go and I fell back upon my pillows exhausted and in a high state of agitation and fright. As soon as I regained my composure and had regained my courage, I jumped out of bed, taking the bed covers with me and ran out of the house into the yard and laid down under an old sugar maple tree. I did not sleep anymore that night. The next day I went over to my neighbors, "Peg-leg" Kelley,'s, to stay until the Crawfords came. Word got around the countryside about my strange experience and everyone said it was the spirit of Old

Flutey trying to steal my bed covers. Some said it was the ghost of an Indian that was killed in that old house by the Cookseys in pioneer days.

Time passes, new families move into the area and the legends of Old Flutey have faded into history, except in the memories of the old-timers still living along the banks of Drakes Creek.