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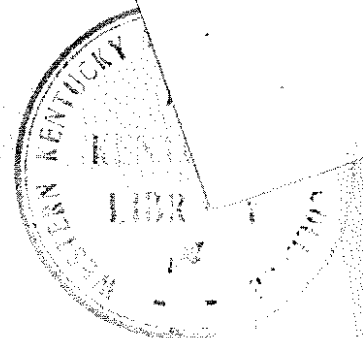
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DUELLISTIC DAYS IN KENTUCKY
(Casey Co. News--Aug. 31, 1933)



"To my oldest son, I bequeath my duelling pistold."

So ran the last will and testament of many an exemplary citizen of the 1840's and 1850's for those were the days when every gentleman of Kentucky, if he had a nice sense of honour, had to be equipped with a brace of duelling pistols with which to protect that honour when the occasion arose.

No tedious libel or slander suits, no long-drawn out court decisions, for the middle-Nineteenth Century gentlemen! Not cool verbal tilts between wily lawyers for them, but a hot-blooded personal joust between the two parties most concerned.

Like the proverbial gambler who had to bet even if it were only to lay a wager on which of two flies would alight first, these "ready on the draw" men of another century were never at a loss to find some excuse to throw a challenging glove into another's face. A delicate innuendo as to the truth of a casual statement, a difference of opinion as to politics--and, presto, a second dispatched to carry a challenge to the offending party.

One is tempted to believe in noting the frequency of these past encounters that many a combatant must have had recourse to his duelling pistols simply to work off steam--perhaps, to soothe the pain of broken heart when his "lady fair" had turned ^{him} down; perhaps, to forget the pangs of indigestion when his mint julep had not been mixed in just the right proportion.

At any rate, most of our public men up until the War Between the States, and even after, found it necessary to defend their honor at some time in their lives and the roster of those who gave challenges and accepted challenges includes such names as Henry Clay, George D. Prentice, Sam Houston and a host of others, Doctors, lawyers, merchants, chiefs-- it was a rare profession that did not come in contact, directly or indirectly, with the duelling habits of the day.

STATE OFFICIALS TOOK OATH AGAINST DUELLING.

So widespread and prevalent was the custom that, as early as 1812, an oath against duelling had to be taken by state and judicial officers and attorneys-at-law. Not only did they have to swear that, since a specified date, they had not given or accepted a duel challenge and would not do so while they held office, but by their oath they were even prohibited from carrying a challenge for another. In 1850, condemnation of duelling was incorporated in the New Constitution of Kentucky.

Just the drawing of blood seemed to satisfy most of the Hotspurs of the age. The most peculiar duel of the time was perhaps one that took place at Eddyville in 1852. The party who was challenged, having the privilege of specifying the terms under which the duel should be fought, made the astounding stipulation that instead of pistol or sword, the medic's lance should be used.

In other words, he demanded that both he and his opponent should submit to a blood-letting in a doctor's office. The opponent agreed, both came together, whether accompanied by seconds we do not know, and a physician whose anonymity has

been preserved, bled the participants in this odd duel until both were white as ghosts and extremely weak from loss of blood. Whether the bleeding cooled the hot blood of the parties is not known for certain, but evidently so, for both considered their honor satisfied and left the doctor's office peacefully.

The poor editors and their papers seemed to be constantly in hot water. If it wasn't one thing, it was another, and if it wasn't a formal shooting match, arranged according to Hoyle, with seconds ready at hand to pick up their remains, it was a good old-fashioned hand-to-hand tussle with the better man on top.

CASSIUS CLAY HAD FIERY TEMPER

Of all the fiery-tempered Kentuckians of his time, Cassius Clay, noted Abolitionist and newspaper man, takes the honors. His anti-slavery sentiment in a district extremely pro-southern in its feelings may have precipitated many of his encounters for, as early as August 1845, a committee of those who disapproved of his violent diatribes against slavery had forcibly removed the press and type of the "True American," the newspaper medium through which Clay expressed his views.

In one of the most serious encounters of the time, Cyrus Turner was stabbed to death by Clay. This was not strictly speaking a duel, but shows the quick feeling of the time as the encounter resulted from a public discussion at Foxtown, in Madison County. Clay himself received a stab wound from some unknown party on the same occasion.

He fought a formal duel with Robert Wickliffee, Jr., in Fayette County in 1841, though Cassius, on more than one occasion, was not fortunate enough to have a second arrange his affairs of honor decorously for him. In 1843, his life was saved by a mere stroke of good luck in an argument with Sam Brown in Fayette County.

In the course of an argument the latter fired at Clay and the ball struck the scabbard of a knife he was carrying. Why he was carrying such a weapon--a Bowie knife--is not known, but carry it he did, and when the ball from Brown's pistol failed to reach home, Clay pulled out his knife. Seemingly going Berserk, he carved up his would-be assassin's face in a pretty fashion, though Brown, the original offender, somehow managed to survive to tell the tale.

DUELS OF GEORGE D. PRENTICE

George D. Prentice, editor of the Louisville Journal, and the Focus, was another hot-blooded newspaper man. He seemed either to have a partiality for the month of August in which to engage in affairs of honor or the heat did not improve his temper for in August, 1833, he had a personal encounter with George James Trotter of the Kentucky Gazette at Lexington, in which neither was seriously injured and again in August, five years later, Prentice and Major Thomas P. Moore had the satisfaction of firing at each other at Harrodsburg Springs.

Mr. Trotter had a "past" as a duelist and in an encounter in 1829 he dealt less kindly with the enemy, for in this duel, which took place near the Scott County line, his opponent had been killed.

As an aftermath of a personal editorial in the Courier in Louisville, there was another newspaper shooting, this time between George D. Prentice and Reuben T. Durrett of the Courier. The rival editors met on the street and, because Durrett took exception to the above-mentioned editorial, the two let loose a volley of bullets at each other which wounded neither party to the fight, but did strike an innocent party.

An instance of what the poor newspaper man of the age had to be prepared to face is the case of a certain editor of the Kentucky Gazette at Lexington, who was shot and killed by Charles Wickliffe as the result of an argument in which the latter had demanded the name of the author of a certain article which appeared in the paper.

GOVERNOR METCALFE RECEIVES CHALLENGE

Two men, later governors of Kentucky, General Thomas Metcalfe and James Clark, were concerned in a duel which had a newspaper origin, though the duel fell through because the parties to the fight could not agree on the weapons to be used.

George McDuffie of South Carolina took up the cudgels because of what he considered an insult attributed to Metcalfe, appearing in a newspaper. Both were members of Congress at the time.

Metcalfe, as the challenging party, wanted to fight with rifles while Clark insisted on pistols. The new argument as to weapons apparently overshadowed the original cause of complaint and as Metcalfe stood pat on his rights to name the weapons, McDuffie either got cold feet or

it beneath his dignity to satisfy honor with plebian rifles and the duel died a natural death.

A year after this episode at Washington, Metcalfe became governor of his native state and eight years later Clark, who was his second in this proposed duel, took on himself the duties of the gubernatorial office at Frankfort.

Sometimes amiable relations were re-established before the combatants had a chance to try out the sureness of their aim. Colonel Samuel Major, editor of the Frankfort Commonwealth, set out in 1857 for Indiana to settle their difficulties, but by the time they had arrived in Louisville, their troubles had been patched up and they returned to their editorial chairs at peace.

Sometimes a little bloodshed was required to re-establish friendly relations. In 1847, two former Kentucky lawyers, a man by the name of Ward and Edward C. Marshall took passage on a steamboat from Frankfort to Utica, Ind., for the purpose of fighting a duel; they came back together chatting like old friends. In this encounter, neither party evidently had murderous intent for after the shooting a note, which Ward had given his opponent's second, was opened and in it was a statement to the effect that "he did not want to kill Marshall, but that he would hit him at a certain spot," and this he had done.

Henry Clay was one of our leading lights who seems to have been frequently under the necessity of defending his honor with a brace of pistols.

He fought with Humphrey Marshall near Louisville in 1809, but no serious damage was done to either party, Clay receiving a wound in the thigh. In 1826, while he was secretary of state, he flung a challenge in the face of Senator John Randolph because of words in the Senate which he deemed derogatory to him.

Whether intentionally or accidentally, two shots of Clay's and one of Randolph's failed to go home and, owing to Randolph's generosity in firing his second shot into the air and saying that he refused to shoot at Mr. Clay a second time, Clay forgave his opponent and the two were reconciled.

Rip-roaring good times were had by all in Washington in those days. Our political figures prior to the War Between the States had other worries besides how many votes they would get on the next election because they never knew when an indiscreet remark would demand a bloody accounting.

William J. Graves, a representative at Washington from the Louisville vicinity, killed another representative from Maine in 1838 while Thomas F. Marshall, a representative from the Lexington district, wounded the editor of the New York Courier and Enquirer in a duel in Delaware.

A requisition for extradition, issued by the governor of Kentucky to the governor of Tennessee, if carried through might have affected the independence of the Lone Star state, for Sam Houston, Of Texas fame, was the offending party. He was wanted in Simpson County for shooting at General White with apparent intent to kill. At the same time another indictment in the same county against the survivor

of another duel there was made, showing that while "pinking" your opponent was not a serious matter, killing him was another.

Another noted hero of later days who greased up his brace of duelling pistols on occasion was Albert Sidney Johnson. Twenty-four years before the War Between the States was to bring him fame and an early death, he engaged in a duel with General Felix Huston of Texas in which he himself was wounded.

BLOODSTAIN ON FLOOR RECALLS DUEL

The old Thomas Kennedy home in Garrard County, which is supposed to have furnished the background for part of Harriet Beecher Stowe's book "Uncle Tom's Cabin," has a legend of a celebrated duel connected with it, which resulted in a bloodstain on the floor still to be seen there today.

The story goes that a man passing by stopped for the night and engaged in a game of cards with General Kennedy. The two got into an argument which was settled with pistols at sunrise, a negro slave dropping the handkerchief for a signal. When the stranger was wounded, General Kennedy sent the negro post haste to Paint Lick for a doctor.

On the arrival of the doctor, he found that the stranger had been carried into the house where he had expired, and on the floor was a blood stain, showing the outlines of a man's figure, indicating where the stranger had lain and breathed his last.

Today, the floor of an upper room carries a peculiar stain, bearing a strong resemblance to a man's reclining figure.

DUELS OF CIVIL WAR PERIOD

The duelling spirit survived even the horrors of the War of 1861, John Grasscup and John Blair, who fought for over four years for the same cause while serving in the Confederate Army, took part, immediately following the war, in a duel at Bowling Green in which both were wounded.

This same war was the cause of one of the encounters of the period. In 1862, William Casto, at one time mayor of Maysville, challenged Colonel Leonidas Metcalfe to a fight with rifles because the latter had put Casto in prison at Camp Chase and Camp Warren. Casto fell a victim, his honor satisfied, but his life sacrificed.

Typical of the spirit of the times was a duel between Captain James Desha and Captain Alex Kimbrough. Because a war intervened, their quarrel slumbered for five years, only to break out with renewed force as soon as the war was over. The two had a difficulty which, according to the code of the times, had to be settled with pistols, but the War Between the States sent the two miles apart--Desha into the Confederate Army, Kimbrough into the Federal. Four years of bloodshed did not dim their personal grievance and hardly had the hostilities of war ceased than the two hastened to Harrison County, the home of both men, and renewed their old argument, on the farm of James K. Duke, in 1866, with duelling pistols.

Not the clinking of steel against steel did these, our forefathers, want. Burning powder and sharp report of a firearm was the accompaniment to which a gentleman secured redress for his public or private wrongs. Eight feet, thirty paces, eighty yards--the decision as to distance was the only variety, for the purpose was always the same. Draw blood, satisfy the delicate nuances of honor, pack up your pistols for the next encounter and go home.

Shades of Henry Clay, Cassius M. Clay or Sam Houston! What spineless creatures they would consider the men of today who settle their personal difficulties not with a pair of duelling pistols, but with dusty law books in a court of law.

