

# Riverton Bull

by Cecil Hayes

A couple of months ago, while vacationing in the hill country of Northwest Colbert County, I listened to some rather fascination yarns told by the citizens of this region. Here is one of them:

It all took place way back in the late 1920s. It seems that a red-hot dispute developed between two neighbors concerning the ownership of a fine young bull.

Sam Johnson, who lived over in Hog Hollow, said the bull belonged to one of his cows. And Mrs. Molly Waddell, who lived over the mountain in Dark Hollow, declared the bull belonged to her cow.

These two went at it hot and heavy but failed to settle the fracas between themselves. It finally got so bad that it ended up in a kind of makeshift local court, conducted at one of the general stores in Riverton. The general store was owned by Jim Turberville and his wife, Flo. Jim was the local constable and was well-liked by most of the townspeople. He often acted as a mediator in settling domestic affairs and was asked to preside over this hearing.

But as easy-going and mild-mannered as Jim Turberville was, this case proved a little beyond him. The matter was getting totally out of hand. They argued up one side and down the other, but the outcome was always the same: both parties stoutly maintained ownership to the same animal.

Finally, Jim came up with the idea of calling in witnesses to support the two stories. And there were witnesses aplenty, too, on both sides. They were good, honest people, known to tell the truth. Half of them swore the calf belonged to Sam Johnson; the other half declared it was Mrs. Waddell's property.

This just made the water a little muddier than before. The thing was just getting bigger and bigger, with no end in sight. Old Jim was finding this a new wrinkle on his horn. Finally, when he was just about ready to start pulling out his own hair, what little he had left, a stranger who often hunted Wild bees in the hills, stepped up and swore he'd seen this same calf nursing both cows.

Then somebody suggested releasing the bull and see what he'd do. And two days later a full report came back; the stranger's story was the gospel truth, that calf was making use of both cows.

In the morning he'd get his breakfast from Johnson's cow over in Hog Hollow. Then in the afternoon he'd traipse over the mountain and take his dinner from the Waddell cow. It proved impossible to tell for sure which cow he belonged to. Finally an auction sale was conducted in front of the general store. The bull was auctioned off and went for \$20, Jim himself being the high bidder.

Jim just walked over to the cash register, took out two ten-dollar bills, handed one to Sam Johnson and the other to Mrs. Waddell. And that ended the story of the wayward bull.