

A man who wrote with feeling of the mountains, John Campbell, said, "Few sights in the mountains were more inspiring than the moving out of the big rafts manned by stalwart mountain hands, they run the mad swirl of the upper waters and sweep on to the calmer reaches far below in the lowlands."

Two brothers, Alfred "Lapper" Burns and Frank "Big Boozer" Burns ran a logging operation on the Bullskin Creek. Lapper Burns' windowless cabin sat at the head of Little Bullskin Creek and it was here his eighteen year old cousin James Burns came from West Virginia to visit. James's father had moved there to escape the violence that racked the Bullskin area but James seemed drawn to violence. It was if he was "exulted in tulmet and strife." He drank, fought with his fists and carried a pistol. Taken in by Lapper Burns James soon became a top logger, rafter and steersman.

The movement of the rafts was eagerly awaited by everyone and the tension would build as the rafts gathered at the head of the South Fork to wait for the coming of a tide. Rafts would be tied up to the bank leaving just enough room for a channel so that late coming rafts off the Red Bird and Goose Creek could get through and tie up below. Men didn't sleep well when they knew a tide was on the way.

Then early one morning Big Boozer's booming call rang out, "Rustle out boys, we've got to get a start soon." Men rose and headed for the raft. James Burns was the steersman so he oversaw the loading of the crew's gear. Men didn't bring much in the way of personal items. High water could strike a raft and wash everything off. Tents were found hung on trees or snagged on the banks. One man retrieved a tea kettle by using a line and hook to fish it out of the water. If a man managed to keep all his personal gear he had to put it on his back and walk back to the mountains with it.

One after the other the crew boarded the raft. "Danderhead" John Barger leaped aboard and stuck a large coffeepot and skillet in the lean-to shanty which was in the middle of the raft. Ab Stidham brought shuchbeans, pone cornbread and other food stuffs while 'Foot-and-a-half" Gibson jumped on with a huge slab of bacon and coffee. Liege and Beige Couch busied themselves with storing things away. James Burns checked the raft and Big Boozer, seeing everything was ready yelled out, "Let her go boys." Danderhead took the rope from the tree which had been holding the raft and then leaped aboard the fast moving raft which soon passed the two cabins on the far bank of the South Fork where the village of Oneida would one day set.

The writer William Ellis told that Jim Ball bought two miles of virgin forest along the South Fork near Oneida and worked it for twenty years in the late nineteenth century. Ball's workforce included several men who lived and boarded with him. Ball's

grandson, Homer D. Allen, told that as a child he could hear the sound of the big saws biting into the trees. "You could hear them all the time---you talk about your skills, why they had skills back then. You couldn't pull them off the hills. They didn't want to do anything else. My granddaddy paid them in cash. He'd go with the first raft to Frankfort, stay in a hotel, and stay till the tide was over. He had a bank account down there. The men rode the train to Beattyville and then they walked back to Oneida. They repeated this process, riding the rafts to the Bellepoint saw mill in Frankfort until the tide ran out and could no longer float rafts out of the South Fork."

In the years after he had "exulted in strife" James Burns had become a schoolteacher and a preacher. He called a gathering of feuding, fearsome men and convinced them to allow a school to open as Burns felt education was much needed in the area. In 1899 twelve men were selected for a board of Trustee's. "When it came time to sign the school charter, more than half of the trustees could not sign their names."

This school became the famed boarding school known as Oneida Baptist. The school still operates. One of my friends had a daughter that attended there. A village of a hundred families soon grew up surrounding the many buildings of the school. There was even a hotel of sorts, a ferry ran across the river for several years and a sawmill turned out lumber and other products. Two men told of this mill:

"The mill set right by the bridge in that big flat bottom." Said Carlyle Houncell. "I have played for hours on top of that. They had a planning mill, they had a flour mill, they had a hoist out of the river with skids where they pulled the logs out of the water. It was a two story thing. This was a room above the boiler and saw and all that part."

"Kelly's was on the far end of town where you go across (the) bridge." Said Granville Davidson. "Man by the name of Jim Kelly. He ran the mill a long time and old man Ponder ran a mill there. Same place, same mill. They traded it back and forth. Right at the foot of the bridge. I've come to the mill many a time. It was a gristmill, a saw mill, a plane mill, everything. That old man Kelly worked in there. He made caskets. He was a good hand to make caskets. Home-made caskets. He would make them out of any kind of wood. He kept walnut, yellow poplar. He would fix them 'till they were the prettiest things you ever laid your eyes on. He ran it by coal, steam."

Much of the violence had died away from the area but not all. George Baker was in charge of some of the building going on at the school. James Madison "Matt" Hensley told, "When a man run out by the name of Charlie Roberts, and I guess he was shooting at George and I don't know what, but he killed the mule. Charlie ran off right across the street---right there and he ran over the bank. There comes George right back with a pistol out by that time and he got a shot or two at Charlie and Charlie ran into Josh Carahan's store. And there's your dead mule."

Only the mule died in this shootout. James Burns made George and Charlie shake hands and the trouble between them ended. Mattie Hacker had given up her farm to establish the school and the town. This shooting might have been the incident that caused Mattie to say, "I tore up a mighty good farm to make a mighty bad town."

Rafts continued to come from the Bullskin. Men like Elijah "Rabbit Eye" Gay, timbered his land at the first branch on Bullskin Creek above the South Fork to run rafts. For years all men seemed to talk about was logging, Tides and rafting. In May of 1898 the Rev. Dickey, who kept an almost endless diary, noted, "A Tide in the river, the first this winter or Spring gladdens all hearts. There are at least 10,100 logs ready for market in this country, worth \$150,000. Half of this has been paid for part of them, those that will float, while those that are rafted are all unsold." With so much money yet to be brought by the deliverance of the rafts men talked of a coming Tide.

By the early 1900s log drives and rafting were coming to an end all over the nation. In 1914 the last raft ran on the St. Croix River in Wisconsin. In 1926 the last one ran on the St. Louis River in Minnesota and in 1929 the Rainy Lake in Minnesota saw the last raft run. It would be in 1927 when the last raft left the Oneida area and men talked endlessly about the date a tide would come. One preacher stood in his pulpit and began his sermon with, "I wish Jess Wilson would get that raft on down the river so people around here would talk about something else."

That last raft left on the South Fork on Christmas Day, 1927. Thomas Britton was said to have taken a picture of this raft. Many pictures were taken of the rafts all along the river. Many of these rafts were tied to the bank and well dressed men and women stood on the raft. When James Burns was past middle-age he dressed in a suit, sat on stump beside a raft and had a picture taken. There were other rafts in the river behind him. There were pictures taken from the river banks as rafts were running the river. Few pictures were taken aboard the rafts. Cameras in those days set on tripods and would have easily turned over and perhaps washed away. The cost of replacing an expensive camera likely kept photographers from setting their cameras on the unsteady rafts.

The first major creek below Oneida was Crane Creek. The lands along Crane Creek were prime logging woods. Ballard "Bal" Howard moved here after the Civil War. He bought land here from the Baker family. For years the Howard and Baker families got along well with some of them attending the Brown Mission Church together. Each family logged its own woods and ran log rafts to market. Israel Howard Sr. was just eight years old when he began to take horses down to Beattyville, London or Richmond to meet his father at a railroad so he and his rafting crew could ride the horses' home. Little Israel's mother worried as he rode one horse and led three or four others through the woods which were filled with bears, cougars and wildcats. When darkness overtook

Israel he stopped at cabins beside the road where he was unfailingly treated kindly and given a meal and shelter.

As he grew into manhood Israel took a more active part in the logging and the running of the rafts. Israel's son, Israel Howard Jr. wrote 'The Last Mold of Clay' telling some of the following incidents. "For a number of years, Tom Baker hauled logs to the mouth of Crane Creek with mules or yokes of oxen for Israel Howard (Sr.)."

The Howards and Bakers spent all winter along with their hired hands, falling and skidding logs along Crane Creek. I believe my grandfather James Reed and his brothers worked for Bal and Israel Howard as for years after this many of the Reed boys had Howard as a middle name. For instance my mother's first cousin was named Charles Howard Reed. I knew Charles well and he was a great story teller.

Pulling one log at a time was a slow process so men tried pulling three or four at a time. If a chain was wrapped around the logs, a pile of dirt quickly built up in front of the logs making it difficult for a team to pull the logs. To avoid the piling of dirt teamsters used 'Gab Hooks', which were short metal chains with a sharp pointed metal hook on each end. A hook was driven into the end of a log and then a second log was pulled in behind the first log and a hook was driven in the end of that log. This way a string of logs could be pulled single file through the thick woods.

It was a long way from where the logs were being felled to the mouth of Crane Creek where the rafts were made up. In some places the creek was deep enough so the logs would float which made pulling them easier. Snaking logs that far on dirt however stripped the bark from the underside of the logs and sometimes the wood was ground down. Men called these 'Flattened Logs' and made sure to put the flattened side down when they made up a raft as the stripped underside lowered the grade and the price the log would bring.

The younger Israel said, "Tom Baker was also invoked in a loose partnership with Adrion Ballard Howard, rafting logs down the South Fork of the Kentucky River to Beattyville or Frankfort from the time Ballard Howard moved to Crane Creek in 1865 until 1898, when open hostilities broke out between Israel (Sr.) Howard and Tom Baker. The neighborly good relationship had prevailed between the families since Tom and Israel were born."

The Howards, Bal, Israel and two of his brothers had a contract to deliver 350 polar logs, 12 to 16 feet long, at Frankfort by the first of July, 1898 and they needed help to meet that deadline. Tom Baker signed a contract whereby he was to cut 150 logs off of Bal Howards land, assemble them into a raft and take them to Frankfort. Tom Baker would receive . . . the price the logs brought in Frankfort.

It was at this time that Bal told Israel that Tom Baker was stealing Howard logs. Israel asked his father if Tom Baker was stealing logs in the woods or at the rafting site. Bal bitterly answered, "Both places----wherever the son-of-a-bitch could steal a log."

The bad feelings that developed between Israel and Tom led to heated words and men ducked for cover when Israel and Tom drew their pistols. Tom stuck his head out from behind a tree and Israel shot him in the neck slightly wounding him. For the rest of his life Israel regretted he had shot Tom with a light .32 caliber 'Owl Head pistol.' Israel felt that if he had been carrying a 'Heavy' caliber pistol his shot would have "Killed the son-of-a-bitch."

Peace was made between the Howards and the Bakers and the logging was finished. The Howard raft lay on the south side of Crane Creek and the Baker raft possibly made up of some stolen logs; lay on the north side of the creek. A Tide had come and on the 17th of April the Howards party rode down to the rafting site to launch their raft. They saw the Bakers were not at their raft and Bal spoke saying, "I hope no one is sick in the family."

The crew readied the raft with Carter Howard at the long oar at the bow and Israel at the short oar in the stern. Felix Davidson stood in the middle of the raft ready to spell the other two. Bal called a warning for the men to be careful as the raft set off. On previous runs Israel had been swept off a raft by low-hanging branches and had been hurled off a raft when it bowed so he knew the risks of running a raft. Not trusting Tom Baker Israel yelled back to his father, "You are the ones to be careful."

What happened after is told by Israel Howard Jr. "After the raft was out of sight, they mounted their horses and headed up Crane Creek toward home. Ballard Howard was riding Israel's black stallion, which measured over 17 hands tall and his mane and tail dragged the ground. My father told me he was the finest horse he ever owned."

"As they were passing Gard Baker's home, Thena came out into the yard and rang the dinner bell. Wilson Howard commented, "I wonder why Thena is ringing the dinner bell; it is way past noon." Matter of fact it was 2:00 P.M. The bell is still hanging on the post, maintained by Gard Baker's grandson, Denny Campbell."

"As they passed Jess Holler, which is half-way between the home of Tom Baker and his brother Gard Baker, a rifle shot rang out from the rocks above Jess Holler. Bert Shores was mortally wounded in the head. Wilson (Howard) was wounded six times and Ballard was shot through the right lung. Israel's stallion ran away with him and carried him on home. There were several bullet holes in his clothing. Hiram Lewis, Jim Shackleford and his brother turned their horses around and galloped down Crane Creek.

"At the time of the ambush two of Wilson's children were playing in the road near Jess Holler, which was near Tom Baker's home. The children were pretending they were making potato hills. James was ten years old at the time. Mary was eight. They heard the shots and saw their father and Bert Shores fall from their horses, and their grandfather's horse running at a fast gallop and Adrion Ballard Howard, holding on to its mane to keep from falling off. Mary started to run to her wounded father and James grabbed her and told her to be quiet or they would kill them."

"They hid in the bushes and saw Tom Baker, Jesse (Fuller) Barrett, and Tom's son Jim come out of the woods and Tom explained, 'We have played hell, we have killed Wilson, instead of Israel.'"

"Gard and Thena heard the shots and ran to the aid of Wilson Howard and Bert Shores. Bert was already dead when they arrived. He had been wounded in the head and was crying when Tom Baker and his party arrived to examine their kill. Tom finished him off, by hitting on the head with the butt of his pistol. Wilson remained quiet and they assumed he was dead. Thena Baker held Wilson's head in her lap and tried to comfort him while Gard brought a mule and sled. They hauled the two of them to their home. They sent word for the Howards to come and get them."

"Wilson lived about four hours after he was ambushed, although he had been wounded six times. He confirmed the word of the children, who had witnessed the massacre. He stated that Tom Baker, his son Jim, Jesse (Fuller) Barrett, and Charlie Wooten had committed the murders."

"The mystery story; which we have heard so many versions; 'Why Thena Baker rang the dinner bell at 2:00 in the afternoon?' Wilson Howard asked her that question during the closing minutes of life. She replied, 'Someday I will tell you.' She never did, for shortly thereafter he died."

"The most logical answer to the mystery I have heard (why Thena rang the bell) was given me by my late Uncle Andy Howard. Of course the intent of ringing the bell was to alert those lying in wait behind rocks at Jess Holler that the Howards were coming. She did not volunteer to assist in this conspiracy. Tom Baker black-mailed or threatened her. He told her he would tell Gard her husband about his intimate affair with ~~her~~ *THENA* if she didn't."

There was a reason that Tom Baker was known as "Bad Tom" Baker.

One of the Howard boys was dead, Israel was on a raft and wouldn't learn of the ambush until he returned. Andy Howard was in the army fighting in the Philippines. That left "Big Jim" Howard in the area. Big Jim shot and killed "Baldy George" Baker, Bad

