



AUNT EL' ROWDEN

Recalls Stories From Late Civil War Days

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Reprinted from 1998 Old Settlers Day, Terry Primas, Editor

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DIXON, MO - One of the county' oldest residents has some memories that are worth reviewing in this Civil War Centennial Year. She is "Aunt El' Rowden, who recently celebrated her ninetieth birthday in the house her husband built for her when they were married. Though she was not born until after the war ended, Mrs. Rowden remembers much told stories of her family's experiences and she felt the effects of the war keenly during her early years.

One of the most dramatic stories was about a mysterious young man killed on her parents' farm while her father was away in the war. One day while Mrs. Baker was washing clothes outdoors, an unfamiliar man ran by her through the yard and into the hollow. Soon pursuers rode after him, shooting.

When the horsemen left, Mrs. Baker and the older children ventured down and found the young man dying. All day they stood by, carrying him drinks of water and trying to make him more comfortable. When they asked him if he had a family they could send word to, he turned his face away and refused to answer.

Identity Not Disclosed

They dug a grave near where he died and rolled his body into it, covering his face with his hat. They never knew who he was or whether the bush-whackers had any real reason for killing him.

The bushwhackers were more feared in this area than enemy soldiers, for they were usually just hoodlums with no allegiance to either side, taking advantage of the opportunity to live by killing and stealing. Mrs. Rowden's father-in-law told her of being accosted by a dozen men he knew as bushwhackers by "the way they wore their boots." This different style, as Mrs. Rowden understood it, was that they didn't put their heel down into the heel of the boot, but pushed it against the back until a fold formed and they were walking on the folded in back of the boot.

The strange men beckoned her father-in-law over, and he said he went with his gun cocked hoping to get one of them, whatever happened. They asked him if he was a Union man and he debated what to answer, knowing that either answer might be the excuse they wanted for shooting him.



Jim and Martha Baker and family posed for this photo taken in 1896. Front row: Becky (Haley), Jim Baker, Martha Baker, Tom Baker and Rilla (Howser).; Back row: "Aunt El' (Rowden), Bill Baker, Ed Baker, Matt Baker, Henry Baker and Ann (Ryther). The Bakers settled in Pulaski County in the 1860s and many residents of the Dixon area are descendants of these early pioneers. (Photo courtesy of Thelma Williams)

Told the Truth

"the truth save me," he said, "I said, 'If there ever was one then I'm a Union man.'" They told him later that they were Union men posing to catch bushwhackers and they asked him questions about local bushwhackers' activities. He had another close shave when he came home from the war once to put in a crop. A neighbor named Haley sold some livestock and took the money home with him in spite of Rowden's warning. When horses passed, Rowden fearing it was bushwhackers going to rob Haley, sent his wife to a point of the land where she could see there, she was to beat

on a plow share so he could hide, for soldiers were choice prey of the bushwhackers.

On hearing her signal, Rowden went to the creek and hid in tall grass. The horsemen came very near him to water their mounts and although he sighted them from his hiding place, he knew it would have been foolhardy to shoot into so many. Later he learned they had ridden their horses right into Haley's house, robbing and killing him.

Raiders Tricked

Various tricks were used against the raiders who confiscated anything they needed. Rowden preserved his horse for a long time by rubbing soap into its hair so it would look diseased and unfit for use. One woman outwitted bushwhackers. Instead of railing at them as most people did, she was hospitable when they visited her farm. They rewarded her by leaving her cow un milked, a real favor to anyone who had to feed a family in those food scarce days.

Scarcity of money was the main effect of the war, Mrs. Rowden felt. As a young girl she did housework for 50 cents a day, and as a bride, she helped raise most of the food on the 40 acres she and Rowden homesteaded. He secured more food hunting, and got a little cash that way, too, for there was a market for the hides of fox, beaver, possum, coon and skunk. The Rowdens reared three children, Benny Rowden and Mrs. Vasca Slone of Dixon and Frank Rowden who (then) lived with mother on the home place not far from Dixon.

One of the most remarkable things about Mrs. Rowden is the hardy family she comes from. In an age when child mortality