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SNAKES!

Since the earliest time of the settlement of the Georgia wilderness, the pioneers of the Wiregrass region of the state have endured every imaginable obstacle. From Indians to outbreaks of contagious diseases, our ancestors faced each threat with courage and determination to carve a civilization out of the most inhospitable conditions.

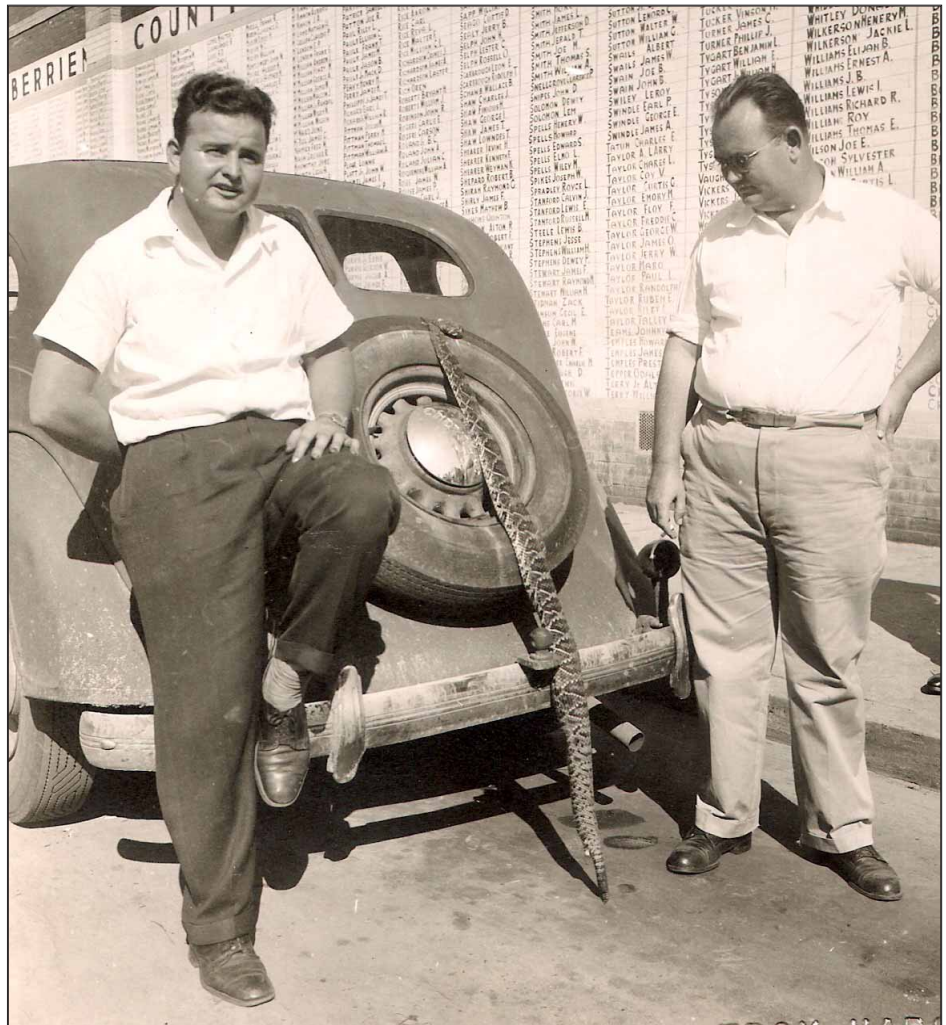
However, one ominous threat has always slithered its way through each generation and even continues to strike fear into the Wiregrass descendants today—Snakes!

It is no wonder that every type of coiling reptile found the swampy, timberland homesteads of the Berrien families, a perfect haven for their species. Rattlesnakes, water moccasins, and many other scaly-skinned creatures were frequently encountered as the families cleared the dense vegetation.

Surely, few encounters strike fear in the heart or take the breath away more than coming upon the coiled and buzzing mound of a sinister rattlesnake. Or seeing the leaves and grass become alive with the smooth motion of the silent water moccasin.

Snake! Perhaps no single word in the farmer's and woodsman's vocabulary is so descriptive and filled with adrenaline.

The frequency of these unwelcome encounters was a topic of discussion amongst neighbors and often found their way into the columns of the local newspapers, as



each farmer had his own snake story to tell.

Most stories consisted of grand details defining the length of the reptile and/or the number of rattles or buttons attached to the tail.

Rattlesnake Killed. Mr. Bill Railey, a farmer residing near Alapaha, reports the killing of a large rattlesnake last week while mowing hay on his farm.

Pages of the Nashville Herald were filled with photographs of huge rattlesnakes, unfortunate victims of a close encounter with trespassers in its environment. Such was the case of this image taken in the early 1950s by local photographer, Troy Harsey of himself on the left, and his brother Edward on the right. The snake is in the middle.

The snake was cut in-two by the mowing machine at about the instant he attempted to strike one of the mules. The reptile was a huge one, about six feet long and as large as a quart bottle.—Nashville Herald, Sept. 23, 1937

Snake Six Feet Long Is Killed With Slingshot. The largest snake seen in the Ocilla section in many years was killed near that city on a farm known as the Barfield place.

The snake had 20 rattles and was approximately six feet long. It was crawling out of a gopher hole, where it had hibernated, when it was killed with a slingshot.

Thin and emaciated at this time of year, the snake would have been an enormous specimen later in the spring, after feeding.—Nashville Herald, April 8, 1937

But as is usually the case, when one neighbor spins a tale, the next one is usually a little more "remarkable".

Choice Huckleberry Is Snake's Rattler. Sylvester—Moral: Be sure it's not a snake's tail when you reach out to pick a berry. Mr. M. A. Dix, of near Abbeville, will not make this mistake again. Mr. Dix was gathering huckleberries the other day, when he spied an especially juicy specimen. Needless to say, he withdrew his hand with some swiftness when he found out that he was holding the end rattler of a 13-rattle snake. Mr. Dix perhaps will give up the "harmless" sport of berry-picking.—Nashville Herald, August 1, 1940.

Not to be outdone by any previous "believe it or not," there was always one more that defied credibility.

It Must Be So. Mr. John Sirmans comes forward with a snake story this week. He states that Dr. W. P. Patten, of Empire, killed a rattlesnake on his farm recently and hung it in a sapling near the public road for the inspection of those passing, as it was a very large



This photo taken by Jamie Connell in the late 1940s, is of two unidentified guys in a manly pose with a five-foot rattler. Few photos of women can be found in a similar pose.

snake with twelve rattles. Then going back to the tree sometime later, Dr. Patten found that a King snake had climbed the tree, wrapped itself around the rattler and had same squeezed almost to a jelly.

That the King snake was removed from around the rattler, turned loose and that the rattler was taken away for stuffing and mounting. That on passing the tree several hours later, that the King snake was there climbing it again.—Lanier County News, July 30, 1930

Snake stories were not, however, confined to the farmer and his fields. Housewives and the domestic retreat were not spared the fright from invading vipers.

Snake's Visit Scares Housewife. Statesboro—The Walker home had an unwelcome visitor recently and Mrs. Walker is just getting over the shock. It seems that the housewife was tidying

up a bedroom when she unwittingly placed a hand upon a two-foot rattlesnake. The intruder had entered through an opening in the screen. Neighbors were called and the snake was ousted.—Nashville Herald, October 9, 1941

And about the time a person thought that their bedroom was a safe harbor from such encounters—

A True Snake Story. Over at our neighbor town of Stockton at the western extremity of town is George Dopson's sawmill and George has an office and a camp home where he holds out through the work days while his real home and his family is in Thomasville. But occasionally his wife and daughter come over and spend a few days.

Last Sunday morning while on one of these visits, the twelve-year-old daughter Miss Nell, went to the dresser in the best room to comb her hair. While thus engaged she heard a peculiar noise sounding like a busted tube and air escaping. On tracing the noise she found it came from under the dresser, and when she looked under it she was terrified to see a huge rattlesnake coiled and rattling vigorously.

She called her mother and she came and got her shock to see the real live, mad rattler under the dresser. She called for help and a colored man came and held his snakeship with a piece of lath until one of the white men could finish the job.

—Lanier County News, August 7, 1924

Sadly, many of the confrontations with the coiling culprits resulted in a more serious malady, even death.

Child Dies From Bite of Rattlesnake. Little Muriel Langford, the 3-year-old daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Luther Langford, who resides about a mile from Ray City on the Milltown-Ray City road died Tuesday morning from what was thought to be the bite of a rattle snake. The child was playing in a potato patch near the house, while her

mother was working nearby, when she cried out and ran to her mother.

The mother thinking the child had fallen down and hurt herself took her into her arms to console it when she noticed that blood was oozing from her leg just above the ankle. Thinking that possibly the child had been bitten by a snake or some reptile the mother started for the house with the child but before reaching the house the child became limp.

Dr. Smith of Milltown was summoned and arrived within a short time after the child was bitten. Dr. Sloan of Stockton was passing and was also called in and both these physicians rendered all the aid that medical skill could give, but the child died within half an hour after their arrival.

—Nashville Herald, Sept. 4, 1925

In one instance the mere sight of a rattlesnake caused death.

Killed By Fright of Rattler— Negro Thought He Had Been Bitten And Dropped Dead. Valdosta, Ga., Elder Barwick, a Primitive Baptist minister, tells of a rather unusual occurrence which happened in Alabama last week while he was preaching there.

A negro turpentine hand was in the act of trimming the bushes away when a huge rattlesnake sprang up and [bit] its fangs into his clothing, hanging to him as he jumped back. The negro fell over and died in a minute.

An examination showed that the snakes fangs only touched his clothing and that he was not harmed by the bite, his death being due to fright.

—Nashville Herald, July 1, 1904

There is one occasion which brought the threat of snake bite into the Nashville home of Frank Allen.

Ray City Man Snake Victim

Russell Herring, a young farmer residing two miles west of Ray City, was bitten by a rattlesnake late Tuesday afternoon, and died this morning at 10:30 o'clock at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Frank Allen here in Nashville.



The huge rattlesnake shown above was killed in 2002 by Jerry Mills, husband of Elva Allen Mills of Allenville.

Young Herring, who was 27 years old and a married man with two children, was bitten while he and another young man, James Fountain, were sawing wood in the Cat Creek swamp near his home. He was immediately rushed by automobile to Nashville to the office of Dr. P. H. Askew for treatment.

The doctor's office was reached between thirty and forty-five minutes following the snake bite. As no serum could be located in Nashville, another thirty minutes was required for a quantity to be rushed from Valdosta.

He rallied somewhat following the first injection, and later additional injections were administered. Due to his robust health he held up well and still hope for his recovery was held as late as early this morning.

—Nashville Herald, August 26, 1937

Surely it would be expected that churches and pastors might be spared the trauma of such serpents, but it appears that was not the case.

Snake Hops Ride In Pastor's Car In Talbot Region. Talbotton, Ga.

Charlie Blunkerly, Negro mechanic, of Mrs. J. A. Battle's garage, Thursday, found a 5 1/2 foot chicken snake coiled on the battery of a 1934 Ford coupe when he removed the floor board to make adjustments.

The car is owned by Rev. W. E. Irwin, county Methodist circuit pastor. Mr. Irwin said: "Several miles out from Junction City I saw the snake in the road and thought I ran over it. I got out to see if I killed it, but could not find the snake. I wondered how it got away so quickly." —Nashville Herald, June 2, 1938

Rattler In Piano Strikes At Tuner

J. F. Setterich was tuning a piano at a Thomas county church and he noticed that one key kept giving a rattling sound. Close investigation led to his discovery of a foot-long rattlesnake inside the piano.

The snake struck at him but fortunately missed, and Mr. Setterich quickly disposed of the reptile with a quick blow with his hammer, getting the piano in tune of the rattler "off key."

—Nashville Herald, Dec. 17, 1936

Strange as these occurrences may seem, they have a long way to go to challenge the Cook County Snake Case.

Snake Bite Kills Ray City Woman

Venom from the bites of two poisonous snakes, a rattler and a moccasin, proved fatal Tuesday morning to Mrs. Jeffie Smith, 31, of Ray City, who allowed the snakes to bite her at religious services during Sunday afternoon and evening.

She allowed the snakes to strike her three times each, it is understood, as a proof of her faith in her religion, and as evidence of the fact that her claim of faith overcoming the poison of the snakes was a valid one. The young woman had allowed snakes to strike her before, and had survived the poison, after suffering from swelling and pain, it has been learned here.



The Cook County Snake-bite Case Principles (Left) Albert Rowan, father of six-year-old Letha Mae Rowan, (right) Rev. W. T. Lipham, leader of the religious belief, who was charged with murder in the death of Mrs. Jeffie Smith of Ray City in 1938. (Center) Mrs. Albert Rowan and her daughter Letha Mae Rowan, with her bandaged hand caused when bitten by a moccasin in Cook County. Charges were dropped in both instances.

The young woman first allowed a moccasin to bite her three times during services of a sect gathering near Lenox, Sunday afternoon. Later Sunday evening, she is said to have gone to Ray City, where she allowed a rattle snake, carrying six rattles and a button, and measuring more than five feet in length to strike her.

She became quite ill later in the night, and was removed to the home of Mrs. Ruth Fender, near Ray City, where she died.

—Nashville Herald, July 14, 1938

Two years later the preacher and one of his followers were arrested for this incident and another one involving a 6-year-old girl.

Preacher Lipham Being Held In Jail On Charge Of Murder. Warrant Detains Him in Death of Berrien County Woman in 1938.

Farmer-preacher W. T. Lipham, leader of which believes poisonous snakes may be handled without danger when "the power is upon" its members, remained in Cook county jail at Adel this week pending conclusion of investigation into a snake-bite death two years

ago. Detention of Lipham was asked by Sheriff N. N. Hughes of Berrien county, who said officers were still probing the death of Mrs. Jeffie Smith, of Ray City, who succumbed after a snake-handling ceremony.

Albert Rowan, arrested with Lipham over a week ago after his six-year-old daughter, Letha Mae, suffered a bite from a copperhead moccasin, was released under \$3000 bond Tuesday after the child was declared out of danger. She was bitten at a snake-handling in Cook county. Both Rowan and Lipham were arrested on grounds that they were responsible for the girl's injury.

—Nashville Herald, August 8, 1940

With all of these snake sightings and bitings, it is only appropriate that there be an antidote for such afflictions:

Fried Eggs An Antidote For Bite Of Snake. Mr. Ike Harnage was in to see us Saturday and said he had read a week-or-so-ago where a little boy had died from a rattlesnake bite and that he knew of a remedy that he had seen tried for the bite of a ground rattler which he felt sure would be just as effec-

tive for the bite of a rattlesnake.

A number of years ago a little colored boy was bitten by a ground rattler near where he lived. He had heard of the remedy and told the child's mother to try it, which was hot fried eggs applied to the bite.

Mr. Harnage says that each egg drew poison from the wound and that when six had been applied just as hot as the child could stand it, all of the poison appeared to be removed and that the child was soon well.—Adel News — Lanier County News, June 5, 1924

It is no small miracle that the descendants of our courageous and hardy ancestors have grown to hundreds of thousands with such tried and proven treatments.

However you would still be well advised that as you go about searching your family roots in the backwoods of Georgia, you better watch your step!—Bryan Shaw

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