

The Legend of Leman's Hollow
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On the high ridge that separates the waters of Gimlet and West Mulberry creeks, a little to the north of the road crossing the ridge that runs from Booneville to Oak Hill, stands a beech tree with the following inscription, 'James Porterfield, aged 27 years, July 27, 1807.' This inscription was cut seventy-two years ago; that was before Tennessee was organized into a State---she was known only as the Western portion of the State of North Carolina, or the State of Franklin.

In the Eastern portion of the State, near the city of Knoxville, stands a beech tree with this inscription, "D Boone ciled a Bar June 10 1760." Daniel Boone was on a hunting excursion, he went through the Cumberland gap into what is now the State of Kentucky. As he passed out of the gap he looked into the valley and saw immense herds of buffalo, and it is said he exclaimed in the language of Job, "Behold the cattle of a thousand hills are mine."

Daniel Boone is the first man that left the mark of civilization upon the soil of Tennessee; it is thought by many that he is the first white man that put his foot on her soil ---James Porterfield is the first man to leave the mark of civilization in this section. Boone made his mark one hundred and nineteen years ago. --- Porterfield, seventy-two. Daniel Boone was alone when he cut his inscription - Porterfield had two companions. They had left the Nashville settlement three days before, came by the black fox spring and Indian trading post, where the city of Murfreesboro now stands; when they arrived at this place they took an Indian trail called Hannah's, it being the trail of a noted chief of that name, crossed Duck river in the neighborhood of the village of Farmington, came on to Elk Ridge to the gap called Hanah's until this day; here the trail divided going in several directions, the Western ran along the main Ridge to Mussle Shoals on the Tennessee river, the East ran along the main Ridge to the prairies now known as Tullahoma. There were several trails going South from the main Ridge; our party took the trail that run down the point near where Mr. McNeal lives; and where or near Mulberry village now stands were several trails, one crossed Elk river at the-mouth of Mulberry creek and went over into the great hunting grounds, the prairies, what are now known as the barrens. In that day that country was one vast prairie. Porterfield and companions were wearied and hungry, they were without provisions; as they expected to meet with some friendly hunter or settler they had started without one day's rations; while meditating and admiring, the glory of the Western sky at sunset they saw a smoke curling above the tree tops in the valley below. They exclaimed "Water and a hunter's fire:" They commenced winding their way through the tall cane in the direction of the smoke. Just above where Henry Dunn now lives, they met a large wolf and shot it. It was now growing dusk, the reverberations of the report of the gun were so powerful that it alarmed them, they imagined that they had been fired upon by some skulking Indian. However, they worked their way on until they came in sight of Leman's lonely cabin or shanty; it was a rude structure, for Leman had no assistance in building it save what his wife could do.

The talking and noise the three made in struggling through the cane attracted the acute watchfulness of Leman's dogs. Leman at the sharp bark of his dogs picked up his gun which was leaning against a stump near by, examined the priming and hissed his dogs, suspecting an attack from Indians as they had just the moon before captured two young hunters named Skidmore and Yates and carried them off prisoners. They afterward made their escape and settled in Bedford county. Skidmore settled on Flat creek and about fifty years ago left there and went to Texas and was living three years ago. Yates lived and died on Sugar creek, where Kin Pibus now lives, and was well-known to all the older citizens of this country as a minister of the old Baptist Church, more noted for his many eccentricities than any great talent.

The Indians had become jealous of the encroachment of the whites upon their hunting grounds and gave the whites much trouble up to 1809, the last battle fought with the Indians in the cedars near where the village of Farmington now stands, in Marshall County. There are many descendants of the company of whites that fought that battle; the O'Neals, of Bedford and Marshall, are the descendants of two brothers of that name that were in the fight; there are many others whose names I have forgotten.

The Indians claimed all this country as their hunting ground. Leman was a trespasser, as he knew, upon that the Indians considered their rights, and that made him quite sensitive to any excitement after the sun had set. Porterfield, hearing him encourage his dogs, spoke in the English language. Leman's wife had all this been engaged in beating corn into meal in the cavity of a stump in front of the cabin. At the sound of Porterfield's voice she dropped her pestle and exclaimed, "Friends from the settlements!" and ran to meet them, Leman stopped his dogs and with gun in hand advanced to meet them more cautiously than his wife.

But they were regarded as friends and invited to the hospitalities of Leman's home. His wife resumed her labors at her stump mill, while Leman entertained his friends upon a log, the trunk of the tree taken from the stump where Mrs. Leman was at her labor of love. This log served the purposes of table, chairs and kitchen for Leman's household. After she had enough meal beat she made it into a dough, spread it out on a smooth board and baked it before the fire; the board was called a johnny-board, the bread was called a Johnny-cake. While the bread was baking she fried her venison steak in bear's grease in place of lard, which is said to be a fine substitute. After a sumptuous repast, a night of sound sleep and hearty breakfast next morning, Porterfield left his two companions with Leman and went on his way alone. Near where Fayetteville now stands he fell in company with Davy Crockett and a number of men in pursuit of a party of Indians that had stolen a lot of horses from the settlements. Porterfield and Crockett were together for some time.

The two young men spent their time in hunting. In the month of October their dogs struck trail of a bear, about where the house of Henry Dunn now stands, and run up the hollow north of his house. The two young men were pressing their way through the tall cane when the foremost man's gun went off and killed his brother behind him. He picked up his dead brother's gun and went on and killed the bear before he cared for his dead brother. The man that was killed

was buried down on the 'pike at the grave-yard known as Whitaker's grave-yard; that was the first white man's grave made in this county. It is strange that everybody in this country has forgotten the name of these brothers; but that is right, their names should be forgotten, the names of any people who have so little humanity in their souls should be lost to succeeding generations. Many people have surmised that the brothers disagreed and the one committed the deed purposely; and they have come to that conclusion on the following grounds: For many years after that tragedy there were strange sights and sounds to be seen and heard in that dark and gloomy hollow. And such evidence as this was conclusive to the early settlers of this county, and there are many yet living who receive this as incontestible evidence.

After many years Porterfield came back to Leman's-commissioned as a surveyor to locate school land that had been given by our-mother State, North Carolina, to the children of the State of Tennessee for the purpose of educating them. This donation was designed to maintain and support public or free schools. Leman and Porterfield were glad to meet but separated in sorrow. Leman was now able to give his friend bacon and bread made of meal ground in a mill on Stone's river near Murfreesboro. The people of this county had to go from fifty to seventy-five miles to mill. In that day there was no wheat raised here, as there were no mills to grind wheat.

(Continued in Fayetteville Observer April 3, 1879) -

We said our two friends separated in sorrow. Porterfield, as you know was a surveyor, and he found that his old friend had settled on a section that by number was 'school section, and Leman lost his home. If these two men ever met again I am not informed of it. I am not informed as to when or where Porterfield died. I am not informed as to his descendants; I think he was related to the Fulton family of Lincoln County. There is a Porterfield connected with a National Bank at Nashville; I can't say that he is a descendant, but I am convinced that they are related.

Some years after this the people built a school-house on the spot where Leman had made his first settlement; it was built of hewed logs and covered with shingles and was called the shingle topped, or Leman's school-house in honor of the old pioneer. The school-house is now gone. When the commissioners laid off Moore County they made the South-west corner as near where the stump stood that Leman's wife beat her meal upon as could be ascertained. And it is now called Leman's corner in honor of the fidelity and industry of our pioneer mothers.

Leman was a considerable man, he was called Doctor; he was a seventh son. He performed many strange and wonderful things. Good mothers of that day took their babes to him; he cured thrash by breathing into the little one's mouth; he removed wens and cured white-swelling or king's evil as it was called by the laying on of hands; he would cure the worst form of tooth-ache by drawing a little blood from the gum on a stick, take a lock of hair and carry them off and hide them and the patient was cured. He kept the witches from the neighborhood by nailing an old horseshoe on the door-steps. When any of the children were be-witched he would cure them by putting a small silver coin around their necks. He cured many diseases among men by causing them to carry a buckeye in their left pants' pocket. He did many other

wonderful things that I have not space to mention, but this is enough to convince the most incredulous that he was a wonderful man.

The people built up a flourishing school for that day, or for any day, in numbers; in attendance there were usually from 50 to 106 pupils. Young ladies and gentlemen attended in great numbers. Assistant teachers were unknown; if the teacher was pressed in hearing his classes he would call to his aid the most advanced scholars to hear a few classes. The teachers of that day were generally bachelors or widowers. They had no permanent home, but boarded with the patrons of the school. The children in studying their lessons would spell and read in this style, baker, shaker, horseback, lampblack, sign, signer, signing; and read as follows: A tiger will kill and eat a man. Horseback is pleasant exercise. The mastiff is a large dog; he will sometimes take down a man and hold him. The scholars would meet at the school-house on the morning of the last day, fasten the door before school hours. When the teacher would come and could not get in the house the pupils would demand a treat; if the teacher refused they would take him to the creek and plunge him in. They called this turning the teacher out. You would be astonished at the scholars this school turned out. They made farmers, lawyers, doctors and poets. I will quote you a few lines from a poet of the Gimlet school;

"In the fall of twenty-four
The coons met at Mansfield's shore,
The younger ones had not to fear
But the older one bit off Barg's ear.
Old Milly Marshall went by guess
And Swore be God they'd killed her Jess.
Nanny Dunn came weeping round
And caused the coons to leave the ground."
(Williams and Grammar anecdote 50 years ago.)

There was one drawback to the Gimlet school and that was the "Legend of Leman's Hollow." The children from this side were afraid to be belated in returning from school, in consequence of the darkness of the hollow and the many things that had occurred after night in that hollow. Many travelers asserted they could hear the firing of guns, the growling of bear and the groans of a dying man.

About the year 1856 two young men living on this side of the ridge became interested in two young ladies on the west or Gimlet side. One of the young men was a hireling, the other was the son of the farmer employing the hired man. Those two young gentlemen were laboring upon the farm; consequently, they had no time to visit the young ladies in daytime, and as it was but a short distance across the ridge where the young ladies lived, they spent many of their evenings there. Being very late one evening, as they neared the top of the hill their attention was arrested by the firing of guns or pistols as they thought, and the rapid approach of men and women as large as giants. There was a kind of halo or light about the advancing body. One of the young men was so terribly shocked by the strange attack, that he was prostrated upon the ground; the other with great difficulty made his escape. He came in home next morning about day-light and reported what had occurred the night before to him and his companion. The

circumstances were so remarkable that the family could not believe his statement. His companion not coming in caused suspicion to rest upon the young man that he had been guilty of a foul deed. The citizens arrested him and were about to hang him for murder. While the excitement was at its zenith the missing man came up, having recovered from his injuries the night before. His statement fully concurred with the other young man's, and he stated in addition that the apparent men and women took him some distance where he fell. Before the war the negroes would not cross the ridge from this side. People that lived on Gimlet would not cross the ridge after night alone for a physician. Of late years there is not so much dread of that section.

It is a remarkable fact that all the apparitions that have been seen in that hollow if by a man it appeared like a woman, and if by a woman it appeared to her like a man. I was in conversation the other day with a good old lady upon this subject and I suggested this fact. She said it was always that way. When she was a child, she heard her mother and grandmother talk of these things and it was that way in their day. She said if a man oversees a ghost it looks just like a woman, and if a woman sees one it is like a man.