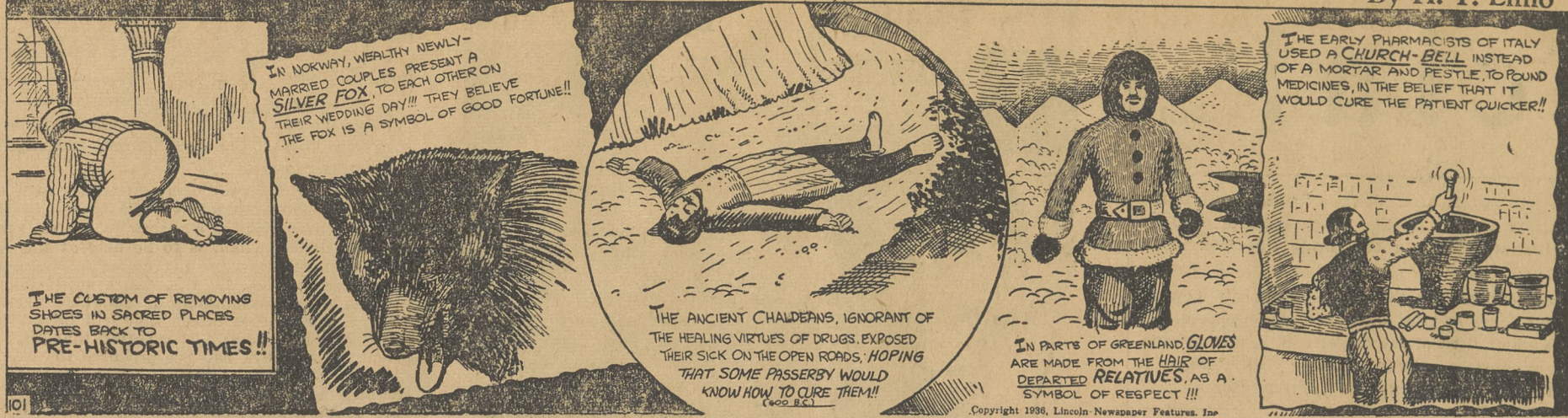


FACTS YOU NEVER KNEW!!!



By H. T. Elmo

Ninety Years Old, Aunt Bessie Has Record As "Crack" Marksman

MRS. WILBUR HAS SEEN ONLY ONE MOVIE, VOTED ONLY ONCE

RECALLS FIRST SCHOOL HOUSE HERE

By JOHN BUSH

The following article appeared in The Sunday Independent and is used through the courtesy of that newspaper.)

Many are the tales told of the early settlers—their daring conquests, primitive pioneering and hardships. But there is one pioneer who, for her simplicity and hospitality, will remain foremost in our mind. "Aunt Bessie" Wilbur, octogenarian of the Back Mountain region, occupies the elevated position.

When your representative visited the hermitage of the grand old lady on Franklin street in Dallas the early part of the week, she was cradling back and forth in her quaint old English rocking-chair, a woolen shawl protecting her body from the chilly drafts, enjoying an afternoon repast—a cup of tea at her side.

"Aunt Bessie," who on September 4 observed her eighty-ninth birthday, presents a picturesque pattern of the fine sturdy stock that began the development of the rural section, back in the eighteenth century, seeing it grow to the thriving bit of country it is today, with its paved roads, fertile fields and good neighbors.

It was during the cold snap of last February that "Aunt Bessie" suffered her first serious illness in almost ninety years of country life. "The neighbors around here will tell you how near death I was," she told the writer, "but I'm getting better every day. I'm nearly well!"

Her face, wrinkled with age, beamed joy and happiness.

Built First School

Mrs. Wilbur, or Bessie Blaine as she was in the long ago, was born in the early part of the nineteenth century, in the old Linskill schoolhouse which at one time stood at the junction of Huntsville and Lehman roads in Lehman Township. Her mother, Mary Ann Linskill, was born in England. Among the most treasured possessions of "Aunt Bessie" is a picture of Sir Walter Scott, celebrated English poet, which was presented to her mother when she was four years old and was leaving England for America. The Linskills settled on Lehman road, bought a farm and built the first schoolhouse in that section.

"Aunt Bessie's father, John Blaine, was a carpenter by trade and carried on most of his contracting business in Plymouth. He was a second cousin of James G. Blain, member of Congress, favorite for the Republican nomination for President of the United States in 1876 and Secretary of State under President James A. Garfield in 1881. Blaine migrated from the West with Charles Turpin, father of Congressman C. Murray Turpin of King-

and then too close to the river. Shortly after one o'clock in the afternoon we arrived at my uncles' home.

"We ate and talked for awhile and then my mother said: 'Bessie, don't you think it's about time we be gettin' home. It will soon be dark and Mary Ann is going with us. We got along well until we reached a bald spot in the road near Trucksville by the Ice Cave Hotel. Here the shafts of the buggy dropped down and horse and buggy 'There was no fast going with a horse,' she remarked, 'just like a cow.'

Doesn't Like Movies

"Aunt Bessie" is not a movie fan, started back toward the creek. Quick, jumped out and grabbed the horse by the bit. My mother was deathly afraid that we might all have drowned. Nelson Myers came along later and helped us get out. When we arrived home my father was coming down the road scared that we got lost somewhere.

She had witnessed one moving-picture in her entire life. She said she saw the film in a movie-house "down along the Boston Store somewhere," accompanied by one of her constant companions Jeanette Osborne, late Principal of Dorrance Street School in Kingston borough. She did remember that the plot concerned soldiers of the Civil War. (Probably "Birth of a Nation").

As a "hair-flower worker," "Aunt Bessie" is regarded one of the best in Wyoming Valley, although scarcely a few remain. In her day and age "hair-flower making" was as popular as "quilting," but was completed by one person, somewhat of a "sample." One design she exhibited contained hair from the heads of one hundred different people and one dog hair. She combed the wool out of the hair of a Water Spaniel and used it in the wreath. Hair-flower making was an art in itself and the aged lady, recalling her triumphs, said: "I couldn't make them as fast as I would think of the different designs." Hair wire used in the task could be purchased only in Philadelphia at seventy-five cents a spool. Hair was woven on this wire and the two shaped into whatever flower-form was desired.

Known as the "little girl with the gingham umbrella," Bessie did the shopping for the household at the Ryman store near Huntsville, when there was scarcely a business house in Dallas.

Twenty-one years ago, "Aunt Bessie" moved to Dallas, where she resided with a niece, Mrs. Stimm. Later she married Harry Wilbur. The ceremony was performed by Reverend Day of Luzerne Presbyterian church in the preacher's home in Luzerne.

Four years ago her husband passed away. She has resided in her little bungalow in Dallas, leading a quiet, peaceful life ever since. She raises peaches—just for pets. At first she shanks from the woods nearby harmed the web-footed, short-legged water fowl. But no more.

It was near midnight one evening not so very long ago, when "Trixie," inseparable canine companion of "Aunt Bessie," was attracted by a rustling in the brush outside the bedroom window.

"I got my gun and we went out to find what was making the noise. I put my foot in the thicket and almost kicked it—then I knew what it was."

Her story got more exciting with each word and she continued, "He didn't pepper me but got away. 'Trixie' chased it under the front porch. I took the lantern and placed it under the front steps. There he sat. He was a big fellow and then I said, 'I'll fix you—you sprinkled my dog.'

Bags A Skunk

"I fired and the shot went through his shoulder. 'Trixie' was well pleased with the kill and jumped on me and made such a big fuss. The dog went after the skunk but it tasted bad—she didn't want to bring it to me. I got a rake and pulled it out, the first skunk I ever killed.

"One shot?" we queried. "One shot," she answered. "That's all I ever give them." Five other victims have been added to her record. She has dressed and treated the skins of three skunks, which she displayed, proudly.

"Aunt Bessie" Wilbur's hunting record is one that a rabid sportsman might envy.

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