

Flashback
Aug 1979

"AUNT" LILAH BLOYED...

By
Robert G. Winn



"Aunt" Lilah Bloyed was born Delilah Loftin near the present town of West Fork in southern Washington County in 1845, the daughter of Rachel and John Stephen Loftin. On March 7, 1859 at the early age of fourteen, she was married to William Bloyed. Two years later when she was only sixteen, the first of her six children, Milton, was born. She died February 27, 1932, and is buried in the Union Star Cemetery southwest of West Fork (until recently called the Winn Cemetery).

One of the first examples of her daring spirit of courage and cunning occurred when she was a slip of a girl working on her father's farm. Every member of any pioneer family had to labor wherever needed to help bring food to the family table. Lilah had been hoeing corn in the field all day and stopped at the free flowing spring for a drink of cold water and a refreshing pause before reaching home for the night. As she sat quietly beside the spring after having drunk of the sparkling water, she saw a deer approaching for its evening drink. The animal did not see the girl sitting so still beside the spring branch. As the deer lowered its head to drink, Lilah stealthily raised the hoe she held and with one swift blow struck the deer at the base of its skull. The move was not made with any sense of cruelty or viciousness. Killing the deer meant fresh meat for the table to feed a houseful of hungry children. It was a part of pioneer survival and an evidence of the sturdy spirit that enabled the early settlers to survive in this developing land.

Delilah Loftin and William Bloyed had been married two years when the War Between the States erupted. Her husband, like almost all other ablebodied young men of the mountains, marched off to war, leaving the management of the household affairs to their womenfolk. Delilah was

already a woman mature beyond her chronological years. The vicissitudes of those Civil War years steeled her to cope with the hardships that lay before her. Like the other women around her, she managed to hold together the family ties. One of her most daring exploits took place during the Battle of Pea Ridge. Word traveled slowly and details of the important battle were far from complete when a messenger brought news that Lilah's husband Bill, and other men from the West Fork area, had been captured by the Confederate forces and would be courtmartialled in a few days.

In spite of the fact that the rivers were flooded out of their banks by recent rains, making the hazardous trip from West Fork to Pea Ridge — more than forty miles to the north — even greater risk, she prepared a basket of food for the captured men; and mounting her faithful gray mare she began the trip to the camp where her husband was held captive. At the flooded river she urged her horse into the swollen stream, swam across and continued north. Darkness had fallen when she reached the camp; this was the way she had planned it. How she managed either to bribe or persuade the guards to let her through, or whether she managed to get through without their knowledge was never made clear, but get through she did, to deliver the food to her husband and the other prisoners. Then by some magical maneuver she assisted them to escape from the loosely guarded compound. The court martial never took place.

Oftentimes during those war years she was faced with almost insurmountable obstacles. Bushwhackers and Confederate soldiers, as well as Union men, made frequent forays into the countryside. Anything the homfolk had to eat must be raised and secreted before those foragers found it. Union soldiers took her strong gray mare, but did leave an older horse in its place. When the horses of a neighbor were taken, that woman lamented that she would not be able to raise a crop. Lilah, undaunted, helped her break two yearling calves, made a yoke for them and helped plow the fields and raise food.

Although physically unable to cope with the marauders, she often outwitted them by her quick thinking and shrewd strategy. She saved her father's life by standing in front of him when he was faced by a renegade bushwhacker demanding the man's money. There was no money, but the invader would not believe this and drew his pistol. Lilah leaped in front of her father and declared that he would have to shoot her first. The man rode away without harming either Lilah or the old man.

Once, when her husband, home for a short time from the army, was on his way to the house from the cave where he had been working in his cobbler's shop, bushwhackers appeared. His wife knew that if the intruders saw him that he would be killed. She ran from the house waving her apron and crying, "They went that-a-way. Hurry and you can catch them," pointing in a direction away from her husband. The bushwhackers, not knowing whom they were supposed to be pursuing, but thinking that the

Woman was friendly to them, spurred their horses and sped past the clump of bushes where her husband was hiding.

Another time she was alone with her small boys when bushwhackers entered in search of money. She realized that interference was futile. They searched the house, split open featherbeds and scattered feathers over the entire house. All the while the woman was trying to think of some way to outwit them. Finally, when they found the new hats that the boys had recently received, and started to take them over the protests of the children, her cunning found expression. "Oh, let 'em take the hats and get the smallpox." At the word "smallpox", the dreaded ravaging disease of those times, the men dropped the hats and fled from the supposedly infested house.

Aunt Lilah had an infectious sense of humor and was able to relate the most unfortunate incidents in a light vein. She was a great mimic and her capacity to enjoy life was unmatched. Whether she had a melodious singing voice we do not remember; we do know that her songs were pleasing to the children of the homes she visited and must have been no less enjoyable to the ears of older folk. Her repertoire of songs and ballads seemed endless and we never tired of hearing her sing. After one of those delightful ditties, many of them original, Aunt Lilah's ample bosom would shake with her jolly chuckles as she recalled so vividly the scenes from former days.

"Aunt" Lilah has long since gone to join the Heavenly Choir where all voices blend in perfect harmony around the Great Throne, but the memory of her jovial nature and pleasant and loving personality live on in the hearts of all who remember her.

