

THE MURDER OF JACOB SINNETT

On the day following the battle of McDowell, being the ninth day of May, 1862, Jacob Sinnett and Solomon Rexrode, close neighbors who lived on Thorn Creek several miles southeast of Franklin, decided they would try to see “the boys” on their way down to Franklin in pursuit of the Union Forces. “The boys” were Henry Sinnett, a son of Jacob Sinnett, and Aaron Rexrode, Sr., a nephew of Solomon Rexrode, both of whom were members of Company E of the Twenty-Fifth Virginia Regiment, which had played such a conspicuous part in the battle of McDowell only the day before. In some way the news had reached them of Stonewall Jackson’s victory and of his being in hot pursuit of the Union Forces on their way to Franklin. They knew “the boys” were scheduled to pass by. Both of the men named were too old for service, but both were ardent Southern sympathizers. Taking their home rifles with them, they came by way of the Schrader home on Jack Mountain where they were joined by David Schrader and Amos Grogg.

They crossed to the top of Jack Mountain from near where John Sinnett, a grandson of Jacob Sinnett, now lives. From the top of the mountain they had a commanding view of the South Branch Valley for several miles. They were disappointed to find it still occupied by a small force of Yankees, as they were then called and as they will be here designated. They probably were stragglers of the rear guard of Milroy’s army. They knew the Yankees would be followed down the valley by the Confederates and they would get to see “the boys.”

They waited patiently until late in the evening when it was time to go home. Intending to return the following morning on the same mission, with the expression from Mr. Sinnett, “I wish the damned Yankees would leave,” the party started for home. Mr. Sinnett and Mr. Rexrode went on ahead of the two younger members of the party. As they approached the location of the present Union United Brethren and Church of the Brethren Church on Jack Mountain, they came suddenly upon a squad of Yankee cavalry. They probably were members of a scouting party who had come by way of the Moyers Gap, or they may have been engaged in setting out forest fires.

Mr. Rexrode jumped over the fence to his right and ran down the hill to the west making good his escape from the cavalry. Somewhere in the course of his flight he ran into a Yankee soldier who was no doubt engaged in setting out forest fires. They at once engaged each other in mortal hand to hand combat. The fight continued for some minutes, Mr. Rexrode matching his superior strength against the youth and training of his opponent. They finally clinched and Mr. Rexrode, being a good wrestler, finally threw his opponent. This gave Mr. Rexrode time to grab his gun, and before his opponent could fully rally he succeeded in getting the muzzle of his gun to his opponent’s stomach and firing. The Yankee got his passport to glory on the instant.

Mr. Sinnett jumped over the fence to the left and ran toward the east. His course lay through cleared fields and somewhat uphill. The Yankees threw down the fence and as they were mounted and he was afoot, they soon caught up with Mr. Sinnett and took him prisoner.

Solomon Rexrode got home sometime in the early portion of the night. The younger men in the party arrived at the Rexrode home sometime later in the night. Neither they nor the Sinnett

family knew what had become of Mr. Sinnett. Mr. Rexrode entertained the opinion that he had been taken prisoner; but they were ignorant of his real fate for approximately two weeks.

As the Yankees had passed down the South Branch Valley, they had taken as prisoners Jacob Rexrode, who lived where Floyd Rexrode now lives, and Andy Rankin, who was in charge of the McCoy Mill. When these men were finally released and permitted to return to their homes, they were told by their captors of the killing, by them, of Mr. Sinnett and where his body might be found. They instructed them to bury him on their return to their homes.

Instead of stopping to search for him, Mr. Rexrode hurried on to the Sinnett home to carry the unwelcome news to the relatives and friends of the dead man. A searching party was at once organized. The body was found by a pine log about 100 yards west of the present home of Henry Caton, who assisted in the search. The body was badly decomposed. Only the fact that it was clad in a suit of homespun jeans enabled friends to give it proper burial. The clothing indicated mutilation of the body by numerous bayonet thrusts. Whether the dead man had been shot in the first place could not be ascertained. His captors and murderers, for they were nothing less, had evidently been playing cards, as a pack of playing cards was scattered over the body when found.

Daniel Propst and George Propst, two neighbors of the murdered man, made the coffin at the victim's home. The old men, women and children of the community buried the body in the Sinnett family burial ground on the portion of the homestead lands now owned by Jesse Mitchell near the junction of the east Thorn and west Thorn.

Sometime after the close of the war David Schrader moved to Ritchie County. He once met a man there named "Duke" who informed him that he had once been in Pendleton County. He then proceeded to recount the incidents of the capture of an old man, and of their guarding him in a stable for the night, and then starting to Franklin with him on the following morning and of killing him on the way. The stable mentioned stood near the present residence of Harry Sinnett, another grandson of Jacob Sinnett. Mr. Schrader, having been a member of the party with Mr. Sinnett and being familiar with the lands and location, knew that the old man spoken of by Duke was none other than Jacob Sinnett and that Duke was telling the truth.

This account was copied from *A History of the Descendants of Patrick Sinnett of Pendleton and Ritchie Counties, Virginia (West Virginia)*, by Walter L. Eye, 1981, pp 6-7, who reports that he took it from *Twixt North and South*, by H. M. Calhoun, pp 65-69, McCoy Publishing Company, Franklin, WV, 1974. At this time I do not know whether this was written in 1974 or was quoting earlier material, hence the references to "where xxxx now lives" and the like are not defined.

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