

From the Iron County Register, Ironton, Mo., Oct. 2, 1913, page 4 columns 1 & 2.

The Battle of Pilot Knob.

Coffeytown, Mo., Sept. 21, 1913.

Dear Friend Eli -- It was 49 years ago to-day -- according to the days of the week -- a long time to remember, but some things transpired on that, and a few days following, which are as fresh to my memory as if it were but 49 days past, instead of 49 years.

The day was beautiful, and father drove us to church in the family hack which he had just repaired, and it looked like new in its shiny coat of black varnish, behind two fat sleek horses, clothed for the first time in a new set of silver plated harness.

It was our first, as well as our last, ride in that outfit, for during the sermon the alarm was given that "The Rebels are Coming." The Rev. D.A. Wilson was our pastor, and addressed the congregation from the pulpit something like this:

"Men, go to the fort and do your duty, and I advise the women to stay at home and take care of the house and children." He dismissed the congregation with an earnest prayer and the benediction. On arriving at home the team was driven and hid in a thicket over on the back side of the farm, during the remainder of the day. The alarm proved to have been a false one, and by Monday morning everybody was in a normal state of mind, and we youngsters went to school, as usual, at the old Arcadia Seminary in charge of "Uncle J.C. Berryman," and I think the late Thos. Essex was one of the teachers. About 2:30 that afternoon we heard some of the real thing -- no previous alarm about it. The Feds, I shall call them for the sake of abbreviation, had a small squad of men posted as pickets on the corner in Russellville where the Fredericktown road from Ironton is joined by the road from Arcadia.

I am relating this from memory, and I shall tell you of things as they come into my mind, and I will probably mention the names of some of the people who took an active part in the proceedings. Uncle William was gathering apples near the house when he heard some one hallooing at the gate which is quite a distance from the house. On looking in that direction he saw a squad of men, the leader of which called out to him asking him if he had a "six shooter" in the house. Being informed in the negative he then asked him if he had a gun. Uncle said, "Yes;" then was ordered to go in and bring it out, "and be ----- quick about it." He went into the house and

buckled on his "seven shooter," took his gun, went to the back door, and scooted for a cane patch which was near. He was shot at several times, but was not hit. Coming on over he found father getting a load of standing corn for his milk cows of which he had about a dozen fat ones. Father drove to the barn, and put the saddle on the horse, took his old squirrel rifle, and they together started to the fort, going first to the picket post to inform them of the "doins" down the road. It was Tim Reeves, so it afterward was learned, who called at Uncle William's, and they must have made a halt, or retreated, as they had not come in sight of the pickets. The alarm was given, and Major Wilson with a detachment went to meet the Confeds, and there was a skirmish down in the region of the Shut-In.

When we came from school we found the fences laid in at every other corner so that they would be less in the way than if left up.

That night about dark brother Charles mounted a roan pony of ours and went to the fort, leaving me to take care of the family and the stock.

The next morning I was feeding at the barn when several men came riding up and asked me what I had in the barn. I told them cows. They said "Got any horses?" and I said, "No -- yes, there is an old horse in there, but he has a bad leg and won't do you any good." I was ordered to bring him out, but they seemed to be in a great hurry and could not wait for me, so they, or one of them, went in and got him -- the last of our horses.

They stopped at the house and went through every room, taking anything that struck their fancy. One fellow had come by some store and had all his pile of bones could carry. He even had a woman's hat all decked with red ribbons and gaudy flowers. They had hardly gone when a big, grizzly -- bearded man came to the kitchen window and ordered Ma to get him some breakfast, and while he was eating he made his boast that the buzzards would have one Yankee to feast on, but he was not enlightened to the contrary.

That was "Old Tim Reeves," and those who were stealing were in his gang or followers. Soon after old Tim had his breakfast a division of Gen. Fagan's army came along, and a guard was placed about the premises and remained on duty until the division was ordered to go forward. Several officers -- four I think -- came and asked Ma to get them some breakfast, but before she could prepare it they were ordered on, and they said to her, "Just save it for us. We're going over there to clean out a rat hole, and we'll be back soon." Eli, they never came back.

During the night a drizzling rain had set in, and about nine o'clock we could see a constant stream of men dressed in butternut over on the road about where Sandford Russell's gate is, and that stream of humanity was

kept up for hours. There are many incidences which happened to different people, some amusing as I look back upon them. Skirmishing began some time during the forenoon and was kept up until about 3 P.M., when a charge was made upon the fort, and for a time we saw and heard a genuine battle. The charge was a fierce one, and was a failure as far as "cleaning out the rat hole" went. There were only about 700 soldiers and citizens, white and colored, but every man did his duty.

The enemy claimed to have had 22,000 or 23,000 soldiers, and lost ten per cent of them in killed, wounded and missing.

The sky had cleared and it was a beautiful afternoon ; but in the evening the clouds appeared, and it became so dark it could almost be felt. The furnace and those great sheds, where thousands of bushels of charcoal was stored, were burning, but it was light only a few feet from the earth, and above that seemed to be a solid wall of darkness. We thought that all the houses in the valley were being burned, and expected every minute to be disturbed, but were agreeably disappointed. That night the fort was deserted and a slow match was put to the powder magazine, and they -- the soldiers, and the citizens who did not care to remain -- were about five or six miles away before the explosion took place.

The wheels of the artillery and horses' feet had been muffled, and so noiseless had their departure been that the sound of the explosion was the first intimidation of their departure.

The next day was a busy one for the boys in gray, in caring for the wounded and burying their dead, and so great was their need for conveyances that they borrowed our hack. They said they wanted to borrow it, and would bring it back when they got through with it. It was good-bye, hack.

I had hid the harness and father bought and [sic] old I.X.C. horse of Uncle Sam, after the Federals came back with them, and that was the nucleus of another team. Father, and a few other citizens remained that night at Pilot Knob and the Confederates complimented those who were in the fort by saying that they fought like devils.

There was a trench around the fort; if I make no mistake, it was 20 feet across and ten feet in depth, and in the evening after the battle nearly every picket fence was made into ladders for the purpose of crossing that ditch, but alas! they were too short. I understand that the purpose of that raid was to get the commissary supplies at Pilot Knob, which was the terminus of the railroad, and was the distributing point for south and south-east Missouri; but in this they were failed. The bridge over Big River was burned, but too late, as the supplies had been sent to St. Louis.

I began writing this last Sunday but got side tracked, and to-day the **Register** came, and it says Saturday next is the anniversary. The battle took place on Tuesday.

I also see in the **Register** that Moses Lax has died recently. I think he and some of the other old colored men were in the fort.

How few of the men who were with us then are left!

Claud C. Russell.

P.S. -- Forgot to say that the most prominent part I took during the day of the battle was in "laying low" down in the cellar, eating Jonathan apples.

[NOTE: Moses Lax was not in the fort as he was with Company D, 62nd U.S. Colored Infantry, elsewhere; however, brother Solomon Lax was in the fort.]

Transcribed by Walt Busch, Site Administrator, Fort Davidson State Historic Site.