

W. E. Oden Writes Of Byler Road Happenings

Editor's note: Senator Emmett Oden has written an interesting story as told him years ago by a veteran of the Civil War.

County.
On the morning of a September day in the late 1860's, a man, apparently in his late twenties, rode into the tavern yard from the southwest, had his horse stabled and fed, and then engaged a room for himself and another man who, as he said, was to join him later.

Strange, mysterious, and often violent incidents occurred along the Byler Road before, during and after the Civil War. It was the "Main Street" of Northwest Alabama, connecting the Tennessee River with the Warrior at Northport, and travelers of all shades and descriptions, including armies of both sides, and roving bands of robbers and other outlaws used it.

The other man, also on horseback, rode in from the northeast late in the afternoon of the same day. The westerner, as we shall call him, met him in the yard of the tavern where they greeted each other cordially. The two men bore a striking resemblance to each other with the easterner being perhaps a couple of years older than the other.

One of the most mysterious and intriguing incidents of all occurred at a well known tavern across the Winston county line in Franklin

After the easterner's

horse had been properly cared for, they went to their room, and later ate at a table apart from the long common table used by such establishments of that era. They conversed in low tones, inaudible to the other guests, throughout the meal which they ate with evident relish. After the meal, they continued their talk in the yard of the tavern, and during walks up and down the Byler Road, until late that night.

The next morning they took the same table for breakfast where they were joined by a local man whom we shall call Bill J. The three men remained at the table until almost lunch time where they talked, and the two strangers wrote letters which they gave to Bill J. When they left their table, they went to

the tavern stables to check the horses and equipment, and, of course, continued to talk about whatever business they had under consideration.

Shortly before one, the two strangers went to their room, and Bill J. joined a number of local characters, former soldiers, adventurers, and others, who somehow had heard something was afoot, and were lounging on the front porch and in the yard of the tavern. Bill J. told them nothing and they knew better than to ask.

Almost exactly at two, the two strangers came through the front door, strode across the porch and into the yard where they stopped and stood back to back from which position they drew their pistols and pointed them

downward. At the count of one, given by the easterner, they began to walk away from each other, a step at each count; two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, and at the count of ten each man whirled and fired at the other. The easterner died instantly shot exactly through the heart. The other staggered about and then slowly crumpled to the ground. He lived for some time, but it was evident from the time he was hit that he was mortally wounded.

The witnesses buried them in the graveyard back of the tavern in two poplar lumber coffins, secured from a local coffin maker, in a single grave.

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