

Mountain Eagle

Wanted to See Old Jasper Jail

Civil War Prisoner Locates Spot Where He Was a Prisoner in 1863

How He Broke Jail

M.M. Cox an old gentleman who resides west of Haleyville, AL, was viewing the "sights" in Jasper Friday. Mr. Cox was particularly interested in locating the spot where the old wooden jail used to stand on Town Creek just east of the present jail.

There was a reason why Mr. Cox was interested in the old jail; he spent some time in it in the year 1863. He said he was arrested and brought to the Jasper jail in 1863 for not enlisting in the Confederate army. There were ten white men and one negro in jail here at that time Mr. Cox said, and they had plenty to eat and some good books to read. After reading all of the books in jail, Mr. Cox said he suggested to the prisoners that they break jail and go home. "I got to wanting to go home," he said.

There was a double door to the jail, one iron door and an outer wooden door. Their meals were brought to them by a boy who opened the wooden door and pushed the food to them through an opening in the iron door. Mr. Cox told the other prisoners that he had a piece of metal that he used to strike fire from flint with which he could raise the lap link to the iron door and open it.

"All the prisoners agreed to help me carry out my plan and get away," he said, "and I opened the iron door without much trouble. I told the man that we would have the iron door open and throw a bucket of water in the boy's face when he brought our meals to us and escape. If the bucket of water failed to do any good we could knock him down with something else."

"When we saw the boy coming," continued Mr. Cox, "I told everybody to get ready and stand with me at the door, and (would you believe it) every man there but one backed out and went back to the other end of the room."

"There was a man in there named Lard (or Laird) from this county who had been arrested about the third time for desertion and he thought his time was about up anyway, and Laird and I were the only ones at the door when the boy came in with our meals."

"The boy opened the wooden door and started to push the food in through the iron door, and seeing that there wasn't any iron door there jerked it back."

"Then he saw us and said 'What does this mean?' It means business," I said. "It means getting out of here!"

"The boy called for help and two men came up with guns and there was no jail delivery."

A lieutenant from Cox's home county (Marion) went up and talked with him and asked him what he meant by trying to break jail and the latter replied that he had been trying to enlist in the army since his arrest and was not permitted to join, so he had decided to break jail and go home where he had a crippled mother and a father with an abscess on his neck and he didn't want to leave them. He also talked with the lieutenant's brother, a captain, and was told that he would be sent to Rome, GA. "That's too far away from home," said Mr. Cox, but he was sent on with a bunch of others and made his escape at Gadsden, AL, and returned home, where, after lying out awhile he went over the line and joined the Union Army and served about a year.

"I was born in Georgia but was always an Abolitionist," he said.

Mr. Cox is a well-preserved man for his years and his natural teeth are perfectly sound.