

**THE 'CANEEY FORK WONDER' -
'A WILD TENNESSEAN WITH FISH SCALES FOR A SKIN'**

CUMBERLAND TALES

Editor's Note: The following article appeared in the newspaper The Daily American (Nashville) on Oct. 26, 1878, Page three. Charlene McClain found this story many years ago while reading old newspapers on microfilm. This story was a reprint from the Louisville Courier-Journal of the previous Wednesday. Charlene McClain is head of circulation at the Tennessee Tech University's Library.

The wild man brought to the city yesterday by Dr. O. G. Broyles of Sparta is truly a mysterious and wonderful creature. He will be exhibited throughout the country by Manager Whallen of the Metropolitan, who is a third owner in this remarkable being, who promises to successfully baffle all scientists who desire to give a satisfactory explanation of his unnatural appearance. Before entering into the details of his capture, which form was quite a thrilling and interesting episode, a description of the curiosity, which promises to excite more attention than Barnum's "What is it?" will be given. At a distance the general outline of his figure would indicate that he is only an ordinary man. Close examination shows that his whole body is covered with a layer of scales, which drop off at regular periods, in the spring and Fall, like the skin of a rattlesnake. He has a heavy growth of hair on his head and a dark, reddish beard about six inches long. His eyes present a frightful appearance, being at least twice the size of the average-sized eye. Some of his toes are formed together, which give his feet a strange appearance, and his height, when standing perfectly erect, is about six feet five inches. A nervous twitching of his muscles shows a desire to escape, and he is constantly looking in the direction of the door through which he entered. His entire body must be wet at intervals, and should this be neglected, he begins immediately to manifest great uneasiness, his flesh becomes feverish, and his sufferings cannot be alleviated until the water is applied. At times he is dangerous, and yesterday morning, when Mr. Whallen attempted to place him in a wagon, in which he intended to bring him to the theater, it occupied some time. The strange creature acted in the most mysterious manner, refusing obstinately for some time to get in the wagon. He has quite a sharp appetite, having eaten a meal yesterday morning that would have fully satisfied at least four men. With the exception of fish, his meals are all prepared in the ordinary way, but the fish is eaten entirely raw, Dr. Broyles says that when alone he will sometimes mutter an unintelligible jargon, which it would be impossible for anyone to understand, but that, in the presence of visitors, he remains perfectly silent.

Yesterday afternoon, from one to four, a private exhibition was given, and a number of physicians were present, among them Drs. Brady and Cary Blackburn, who said that his scaly condition could not be attributed to any skin disease, but undoubtedly he was born in that condition. He will be on exhibition in one of the private rooms of the Metropolitan Theater this afternoon and tomorrow between the hours of one and four o'clock. Only physicians and those specially invited will be allowed admission. His exact age is not known, but for the past 18 years he has been running wild in the Cumberland Mountains in Tennessee, near the Caney Fork and Big Bone Creek. He has been the constant terror of the community, although he has never known to attack any one until the day of his capture. Dr. O. G. Broyles of Sparta says that since the surrender of the Confederate Army it has been his intention to capture this creature and exhibit him throughout the country. The doctor says the parents of the wild man are respectable citizens of North Carolina named Croslin. That their son is unquestionably a mysterious freak of nature they did not deny, but they could not account for his scaly skin.

At the tender age of 5 years, having always been possessed with a roving disposition, he left home and plunged immediately into the mountainous region of Tennessee. Here he lived as best he could, subsisting on the products of the country, such as roots and herbs and small animals that he could capture. When in the water he was in his element. He would dive down into the depth of the island lake, remaining under water for a considerable length of time, and finally emerge with both hands filled with small fish, which he would devour at once in the raw state. Dr. Broyles says that until about 18 months ago, he had not attempted the capture, although he had been watching the creature's actions for the past 12 years. About the 15th of September, he started into the mountains fully determined to succeed in the capture.

The "Wild Man of the Woods," as he was termed by the people of the vicinity, was unusually fleet of foot and possessed with a great deal of agility, bounding over the mountainous ravines in the most fearless manner. During the chase they kept the wild man constantly in sight, and their plan was to tire him out, in which they finally succeeded. He was pursued through the wild, mountainous country, over lakes and precipices, until his pursuers almost despaired of success. Stratagem was finally resorted to. The lariat was thrown at him without success, and then a kind of net trap was formed, into which he was decoyed and captured. He ran fearlessly into the net, and became entangled in the meshes. Captured, but not conquered, a struggle ensued, in which Dr. Broyles was seriously wounded. The wild man fought with his hands, after the fashion of a bear, and bruised and scratched the Doctor in a frightful manner. At last they quieted their unwilling victim and brought him to Sparta. The Doctor immediately telegraphed to Mr. Whallen, who purchased a third interest in the wonder and had him brought to Louisville yesterday morning. The presence of this wild man in Louisville has excited considerable attention among the doctors, and also a large crowd of curious persons, who are anxious to see the wonderful creature. There will be only one public exhibition in this city, which takes place at the Metropolitan Theater, Saturday afternoon.

Note: During the re-typing of this article, Charlene decided to do a little research to determine if there really was a Dr. O. G. Broyles of Sparta. The 1880 Census of the 1st District of White County does have this gentleman listed as a dentist of 53 years old. He had four daughters and his sister, Mary, living in his household.

Census Place: 1870 District 1, White Co., Tennessee

Dwl: 53 Family: 54

J. M. Broyles M W 49 Farmer TN

Rebecca Broyles F W 35 Keeping House TN

David Broyles M W 1 TN

Census Place: 1870 District 1, White Co., Tennessee

Dwl: 54 Family: 55

Onslow G. Broyles M W 40 Dentist TN

Susan W. Broyles F W 28 Keeping House VA

Wade Broyles M W 2 TN

Not named Broyles F W 2/12 TN

Mary H. Broyles F W 29 House Keeper TN

M. Capshaw M W 8 TN

Census Place: 1880 District 1, White Co., Tennessee

Source: FHL Film 1255285 National Archives Film T9-1285 Page 395B

	Relation	Sex	Marr	Race	Age	Birthplace
O.G. BROYLES	Self	M		W	53	TN
	Occ:	Dentist	Fa: TN	Mo: VA		
Susan N. BROYLES	Dau	F		S	W 12	TN
			Fa: TN	Mo: VA		
Emma R. BROYLES	Dau	F		S	W 10	TN
			Fa: TN	Mo: VA		
Anna M. BROYLES	Dau	F		S	W 7	TN
			Fa: TN	Mo: VA		
Jennie N. BROYLES	Dau	F		S	W 5	TN
			Fa: TN	Mo: VA		
Mary H. BROYLES	Sister	F		S	W 54	TN
			Fa: TN	Mo: TN		

Census Place: 1900 District 1, White Co., Tennessee

Dwl: 373 Family: 391

Jonathan Paul Head 27 M W May 1873 Married (6 yrs. md) Farmer TN VA TN

Virginia W. Paul Wife 24 F W October 1875 Married (6 yrs. md) (2 children born, 1 living) TN TN TN

Virginia B. Paul Daughter 5 F W December 1894 Single TN TN TN

Onslow Broyles Father-in-Law 72 M W January 1828 Widow TN TN VA

SOURCE: White County, Tennessee Cemeteries Vol. 1 by Fred Clark, 2003, pg. 302.

Highland Cemetery, Section N: Sparta, TN, south end S. Highland Dr. at Cooper St.

Onslow G. Broyles, b. 1 January 1828, TN – d. 8 December 1902 – 13 Cov. C. S. A.

Married 13 February 1866

Susan W. (Nowlin), b. 26 November 1841, VA - 11 September 1876

Mary H. Broyles, b. ca. 1826, TN - ca. 1906 (sister – shares Broyles headstone)

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