

THE WILDHAIRD HILLTOPPERS

By John F. Hall

On the front cover of the official preview guide for the 40th annual Trigg County Ham Festival is a picture of the Wildhaired Hilltoppers. I am not that good in math, but I can subtract 1970 from 2016 and come up with a difference of 46 years. This group existed



six years before the Ham Festival started in Cadiz. I was in this group for two years 1970-1971. I wondered why the Ham Festival used the picture since the group disbanded before the first Ham Festival. If my poor memory serves me correctly, I submitted a story about this group when I served as the Historian for Trigg County Historical Society's 1985 Trigg County History Books. I remember my days as a member of the Wildhaired Hilltoppers. I was always getting the short end of the stick

in shoot outs with the Golden Pond moonshiners. I played the role of the Chief "Revenooer." I wore a top hat, big silver-star badge and a long overcoat. Trigg County was celebrating its 150th anniversary in 1970 and they wanted folks to get involved in the sesquicentennial celebration. Denzil Bridges started the group and he asked me to play the part of the Chief "Revenooer." I wrote the following history for the Trigg County History Book, Volume One.

"During the 1970 Sesquicentennial of Trigg County a fun organization of business and professional men was created called the "Wildhaired Hilltoppers." They painted a WW II



vintage jeep in three colors of red, white and blue, and displayed an authentic moonshine whiskey still on a long trailer. The still included real mash fermenting in an oak barrel. Fresh maple trees were cut to add realism to the display. The men dressed in bib overalls, many with beards and mountain men hats. This entourage of moonshiners, pursued by revenuers, paraded their still through four states during the early 1970's. Pet groundhogs guarded the moonshine still while the music of "Good

Old Rocky Top" could be heard coming out of the eight-track stereo system mounted in the jeep.

The Trigg County Judge Executive, the Cadiz Mayor and the President of the Chamber of Commerce praised the group for goodwill it had brought to Cadiz and Trigg County. The Wildhaired Hilltoppers average two or three parades a month ranging from Portland, Tennessee, to Pickneyville, Illinois. They won First Place in the Evansville, Indiana Fall

Festival in 1971. The group was honored with Colonel Commissions by Governor Louie B. Nunn and they participated in the inaugural parade for Governor Wendell Ford. Most of the members of the Wildhaired Hilltoppers were residents of Golden Pond before the town was taken over for the Land Between the Lakes. The group was featured on WSM-



TV, Nashville Tennessee and WPSD-TV, Paducah, Kentucky. The members of the Wildhaired Hilltoppers went on to form the East Golden Pond Volunteer Fire Department to serve the citizens of that area."

I enjoy writing stories about my life in Kentucky. I lived in Golden Pond for about a year when I married Paula (Oakley). This was way back in 1965. I was just 19 and still in the Army. We lived with Paula's parent's Andrew and Pauline Oakley. I was a

city boy from Orlando, Florida. Living on a farm with cattle was new to me.

I operated a small tractor to disk the field behind the house. I ran over the tail of a copperhead snake and it came after me. I put the tractor in neutral and jumped off to run to the house to get a rifle. When I came back the snake was going round and round the tractor trying to find me. When I could get a clear shot, I shot that snake 22 times. I remember running from a mad pig after I tried to pick up one of her baby pigs. I got an old farm truck running that I called "Wildchild." I really liked that small town and the people who lived there.



The TVA forced everyone to move out to make the Land Between the Lakes National Recreation Area. I had no love for the TVA, but I was requested to make a documentary film funded by the Kentucky Humanities Council. I agreed to do the project only if I had full control of the history of moonshine in Golden Pond. In the process of

making the history, I also made a short movie and a demonstration of the making of moonshine. I received a one-day permit, from the ATF, to legally make moonshine in the LBL as part of a demonstration for the TVA. This was featured on WPSD-TV. I made a movie during this demonstration that I called "The Boy and the Moonshiners." My late nephew, Dale Garner played the role of the boy. Since I was required to destroy the mash, I had the moonshiners pour it out in the movie. I had a brief cameo appearance as

the “revenuer” chasing the moonshiners. My Chief moonshiner, the late Billy Joe Hooks, did taste of his double run “makins.”

I have to admit that I was blessed to be able to serve as a historian when I was not a trained historian. I worked closely with my friend Tom Vinson to save as much history about the families of Trigg County as we could. We were volunteers. We did not do this for money. We did this for future generations to read. I did not know that Trish Cunningham would bring a baby to church one day. This child goes by the name of Jade and I watched her grow into a pretty young lady who adopted me as her Mr. John. We went on a field trip last year to look at the construction of the new bridges and to look at the bison. Less than a mile from where we stood, looking at the bison, I made that short movie about the boy and the moonshiners. I told Jade that I use to call up cattle to feed them corn. I thought I might be able to call up the bison to make them come to the fence where Jade and I were standing. I yelled out the call and the bison looked at me. I guess they thought I was crazy. They just continued to munch on the grass.

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