

## UNCLE HICK LOFTIS AND THE RAWHIDE ROPE

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'Writers Corner'

I was born on the old Abner Chaffin home place, which is the way we in Tennessee continue to refer to certain places even after their association with the people for whom they are named has long ceased. Since about 1948, this place has been owned by my daddy's "own" cousin, Roger Lynn and lately his heirs, Betty Jo Apple and Bobby Lynn, but we still persist in calling it the Abner home place since Abner moved his family there in the winter of 1858 and built the big house in 1904. The next farm upriver from the place of my birth belonged to Hickman P. Loftis and being southern, we called him "Uncle Hick." Now Uncle Hick was not my Uncle but since the Chaffin's and the Loftis' were highly intermarried, we tended to have a lot of "Uncle" somebody or another Loftis. Uncle Hick was a man who could weave a story around any given event and was a joy to listen to since he never let the facts take precedence over the story. The flow and fabric of the story were the important things. If you wanted history, or accuracy get a text book, the story that was what Uncle Hick wanted to excel in, and excel he did.

One hot day in late May, Uncle Hick was outside gathering up some kindling after a short but drenching rain shower. He had been cutting some chestnut logs back on the ridge that dropped over to Morrison's Creek in preparation for rafting them down Roaring River to the Cumberland and on to Nashville when the first respectable spring "freshet" (flood) occurred. There he would sell them for hard-to-come-by cash money and walk back home from Nashville to Gainesboro, or if times were really good, catch a steamboat packet to Anderson's Landing.

Daddy pulled our A Model to the side of the road, ambled up into the yard, and said, "Uncle Hick, what in the world have you been a doing this morning?" Uncle Hick raised his dilapidated felt work hat off his head and rubbed his hand through what little growth he had left on top, spit in an admirable manner, than said. "Well. I'll just tell you, this here has been some morning. I was a snaking them chestnut logs off the ridge this morning and I was a suing a new rawhide rope one of the boys plaited up for me. Jest as I commenced to drop off the flat part of that ridge, it come up this little shower and it poured puppy dogs and little green frogs for a few minutes. Well, I jest lowered my head and kept urging old Kit and Bell along toward the house, cause they knowed they was headed down toward the barn and they was no stoppin'em when they got going like that."

He moped the back of his neck with a well worn handkerchief for the sun was shining brightly now that the shower had passed, and the day was as humid and steamy as you could find. Rubbing his chin, he shook his head slowly, then continued his story. "I'll tell you son, I was as surprised as any man you ever saw, when I looked back and realized that log was still laying back on the ridge. The rawhide rope being new, and getting wet and all, it had started to stretch and it was still a laying right back on that ridge. Well, I didn't do a thing but take a few loops around that big ole stump over there in the corner of the yard, tie her off and go on in the house to eat dinner. Long about," he raised is head and squinted toward the sun, "12:30 or so the sun popped out and everything commenced to drying out. In a little while, I started hearing this rumbling sound out behind the house and went out on the back porch to see what the racket was. Don't you know the sun being popped out hot and all, had stated that rawhide rope to drying out and it was shrinking up fast. As it shrunk up, it was pulling that log off the ridge and a little while ago that thing come a snaking up into the yard."

Daddy was laughing by that time, and said "Uncle Hick", I think you are telling me a tall tale. You wouldn't put the shuck to me would you?"

Uncle Hick's face became long and serious looking and then he turned toward the corner of the yard, "I reckon if you don't believe me, you can walk over there to the corner of the yard and look for yourself. You'll see that log is a laying there just like I said. The rawhide rope still tied to it and jest as short as can be. Why you can s'even see where the ground is skinned up by that log being snaked along."

“Now I ask you, what more proof than that could a man want?”

Daddy wiped the sweat from the band of his straw hat, and grinned, knowing that Uncle Hick had pulled him in and had a little fun at his expense. Truth be told, it was what Daddy had stopped for, and Uncle Hick had met his expectations.

“Well, Uncle Hick we better get going toward the house, won’t you go with us?”

“Can’t do it Son, got work needs to be done around here and the wife takes it poorly when it goes begging. Why don’t you come in though and we’ll see if we can’t rustle up some cold biscuits or something to keep you til you get home.

“Oh, I better get started or Maylene will think I left the country.”

With the necessary exchange of invitations taken care of, Daddy started up the old A Model and headed off down the brown river gravel road, but for as long as he lived, Daddy would tell the story of Uncle Hick and the rawhide rope as an example of the “proof” we are often asked to accept when urged to believe the tall tales preachers, politicians and pushy people offer up.

The difference is, Uncle Hick was just doing it in fun and didn’t expect that anyone would take it seriously.

Be careful what “proof” you accept for the things people ask you to believe. Have a blessed day.

Read more of Robert “Bob” Rodgers Chaffin stories at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>