

## RETURN OF ISAAC KELLY

Today it is so easy to make contact with distant relatives (by letter, phone, e-mail, etc.) that it is hard to imagine how difficult it once was for relatives to keep in touch. If your relatives left this area to live in Texas, Arkansas or Oklahoma as recently as a century ago, you wondered if you would ever see them again or hear their voices once more.

In July 1912, John Kelly, a York Cotton Mill worker, got word that his long-lost brother, Isaac, was on his way to Yorkville. For 32 years John Kelly and his mother had attempted to find Isaac whom they had last seen in Texas.

It seems that around 1870 the Kelly family had moved from Cleveland County, N. C. to Hayes County, Texas. Ten years later the father had died and the mother decided to bring her 3 sons back to Carolina.

They packed their belongings in a covered wagon and set out. On the road in Dallas County, Texas, Isaac, who was then a boy of 13, had his leg badly broken by a wagon wheel running over it. The mother and his two brothers stayed with Isaac awhile but then decided to leave him with a man by the name of W. H. Shinal in Kaufman, Texas . Mrs. Kelly gave Shinal \$20 to take care of Isaac until he recovered.

When the Kellys got to Hot Springs, Ark. they wrote Shinal but got no reply. Later they wrote to the chief of police of Kaufman. The chief wrote back that Shinal had left town and taken the boy with him.

The only recourse the Kellys knew of was to advertise in Texas newspapers. For 32 years they advertised several times a year. Finally, Isaac was located on a farm near Kaufman. He was then 46 years of age, had a wife and three children and one grandchild.

John met his long-lost brother at the train station in Blacksburg. Isaac told him that he was aware of the letters but he could not read them and Shinal misrepresented the contents. Shinal told Isaac that his mother had written to say that their horses had been stolen, but not to be alarmed, she would make other provisions to send for him.

Reading another letter, Shinal said that the boy would be sent money to travel and reunite with his family. The money never came.

Isaac said that Shinal was "a rough, heartless fellow." As soon as he could manage it the boy ran away from Shinal. He said he had a very hard time of it. Isaac showed him where a piece of bone had come out of his broken leg. He also had a twisted arm that came about when he fell from a tree.

After a reunion of the three Kelly brothers, Isaac went to see his mother who lived about two miles south of Riddle's mill in Bethel township. As John Kelly described it, it was a "grand reunion."

Isaac Kelly didn't deliberately disappear but some relatives did. J. S. Sturgis of Chester wrote this letter (in part) to a Rock Hill paper, *The Record*, Feb. 10, 1929:

"I have just been advised by a kinsman in the West that my uncle, "Billy" Sturgis, who mysteriously disappeared from his home near Crockett, Tenn., in

either 1890 or 1891, and was never heard of again, although diligent inquiry was made for many years, and had been given up for many years as dead and almost forgotten by the family, has suddenly returned in the home of his people (those who are still living) at Crockett, Texas. I am advised of no particulars any more than the fact that he has returned home after an absence of more than 38 years.

...

"I have no means of communicating with the entire family connection and I would appreciate it if you will get these facts together and publish a short news story in your paper."

We don't know what explanation Uncle Billy Sturgis had for his long absence but we're willing to bet that all the relatives who could manage it showed up to welcome him home.

By Louise Pettus