

Tale Took Listeners For Ride Man Thought He Served As Witch's Transportation

Witches, banshees and goblins were very real to the Scotch-Irish settlers of this area. They brought stories from Northern Ireland and told them around the fire for generations.

A frontiersman's vivid imagination, coupled with events that had no ready explanation, embroidered upon in the retelling, resulted in accounts that sometimes merged to make an even better story. Here's one such story:



Nearby
History

**Louise
Pettus**

It is said that along about 1820 or 1821, one Moses Gabbie, about 28 years old, who lived 2 miles from the York County Courthouse, was regularly visited by a woman known to be a witch, old Mrs. Biggart (or Biggers). Gabbie's family reported that all day he lay in bed in a stupor, hard to rouse, but near midnight he would spring out of bed with a shout, run from the house and stay out until dawn. When he returned, his hands and feet were covered with chestnut burrs.

Gabbie told the family that he couldn't help himself. Every night he served as a horse to be ridden by old Mrs. Biggart as far as old Violet Weston's house. While he was hitched to a tree in the front yard, a group of witches danced the night away in the dilapidated house.

Moses lived with his sister, Elizabeth, and her husband, William Watson Burns, who at first tried hard to prevent Moses' nightly wanderings but, finally, gave up under the belief that he was truly bewitched. It was a nightly occur-

rence, winter and summer. After a while, the family was able to sleep through the nightly yells and galloping about, and each morning the children picked the burrs from Moses' hands and feet without having to be reminded.

According to Dr. Maurice Moore, who tells the tale in his "Reminiscences of York," Sam Burns, father of Moses Gabbie's brother-in-law, was talking with Col. Billy Ferguson about haunts. Burns believed in such and accepted Gabbie's condition. Ferguson laughed at Burns and bet him

that he could devise a way to keep Gabbie at home. Burns insisted that it was supernatural. The two arranged a night the following week to carry out Ferguson's experiment.

The two men waited in Moses' room by a flickering fire. Ferguson dozed by the fire and Burns lay at the foot of Moses' bed. When Moses rose and let out a terrible yell, the two men rushed into action, except that Ferguson mistook old Burns as Moses and grabbed at him. Burns mistakenly thought that he was being mounted by Moses who would use him as a horse that night. Burns rushed to get under the bed. In the confusion, Moses was out the house for another night abroad.

Ferguson did not make any further attempt to deter Moses, who kept up the behavior for another five years.

Moses was cured by a Dr. Brindle of Lincolnton, N.C., who was famed for curing such cases. Old Mr. Burns had heard of Brindle and fetched him to Yorkville for this purpose.

Word got around and a crowd of around 50 people came to watch. Dr. Moore described the procedure in this way: "The first step — was to administer an emetic, which caused Moses to eject from his stomach crooked pins, needles, hair balls, etc. . . . After this, a black cat, which had been procured for the purpose, was tied to a chair, a switch of dead hogweed was provided, and doctor gave the cat nine 'clips,' Moses then taking the switch, gave the cat the same number of strokes, then waited nine minutes and resumed — striking a different number of times, and pausing longer or shorter periods, but always by odd numbers."

The doctor told the crowd that this would bring the witch to them. She would ask for some small thing and was to be refused, but she would hang about waiting.

Sure enough, Mrs. Biggart came walking up to ask for some buttermilk. She had not been seen at Burns' house for many years. Late that evening, Mrs. Burns gave Mrs. Biggart some buttermilk and she left, satisfied — Dr. Moore ended his tale with the observation: "From that hour Mosie Gabbie was free from the spell, and slept in his bed all night like other folks."

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