

HOG KILLING DAY

By: Bobbie Mooney Sellers

Hog killing day in the early days of Brunswick County was looked forward to with dread and with joy. The reason for dread was the hard work and the joy was at last we would have fresh meat to eat and would continue to have pork meat to eat for the rest of the winter. As a child and later as a teenager, if we were a good worker at a hog killing, we were allowed to miss one day of school.

We looked forward, with anticipation, to the arrival of the first really cold day of the winter season. We knew this would be the day we got up before daylight and started getting ready to kill hogs. Usually, we got our first big frost of the season about the second week in October, however, the hogs were not fat enough this early in the year.

In those days, the hogs were turned into the peanut patch after the peanut hay was cut, dried and put in the shed to be used for feed for the horses, cows and mules, also for the oxen if you happen to own one. Also, enough peanuts were dug to provide seed for the next spring's planting. Peanuts were dug and let dry until the dirt would easily shake off and put in the shed. As soon as possible, the dry peanuts were picked off the bushes and placed in the barn to continue drying until cold weather. Then Daddy would put a fence around the field of peanuts and put all of his hogs in the field to "root," with their snout, the peanuts out of the ground. Later years, instead of peanuts, the hogs were turned into the soybean fields to get fat.

Hopefully, at least one hog would be fat by Thanksgiving Day. Usually one farmer in the community would kill at least one hog on Thanksgiving Day. The farmer who was able to get a hog ready for slaughter would invite close family members, special friends and neighbors to join him for the celebration. Each person or family who came to help got to eat dinner and then would be given "fresh meat"—freshly killed and without salt added—to take home with them.

For regular hog killing days, Daddy would start preparing several days in advance. There was wood to cut and haul to areas for scalding the hogs and for cooking the fat to make lard. He got all the knives cleaned and sharpened. All available washtubs were scrubbed and put in a place where they would stay cleaned until needed. The benches inside the smokehouse were scrubbed and rinsed. When the day arrived he wanted everything ready.

The day began about an hour before daylight. While Mama cooked breakfast, Daddy would get the fire started under the scalding vat and under the wash pot which were filled with water. Daddy used a metal barrel for the vat. A hole was dug in the ground so the barrel could be placed at a 45 degree angle. The hog was placed in the hot water until the hair could be pulled off easily. When the hog was scalded and the hair was either pulled or scraped off he was lifted by several men and put on the gallows. The heels of the back legs would be cut and the heel string was extracted without being severed so that a smooth stick (gamble) was inserted into the heel string. This helped hold the hog on the log that was placed on top of two forked poles (gallows).

After a thorough scrubbing with soap and water the hog was ready for the gutting process. The intestines would be removed and saved to make chitlins or to serve as casings for the sausage that would be made later in the day. The liver and heart would be removed and placed on the clothes line to dry. The head would be placed in water to soak before being used.

Not everyone possessed the skills necessary to cut up a hog. A person good at cutting up a hog was invited to neighbors just for the purpose of cutting the meat up properly. They were never

paid with money but were paid with fresh meat to take home and they gained in status as a valuable member of the community.

As soon as the first hog was cut up the designated cook for the day and her helpers, usually the younger girls, would begin cooking dinner. Dinner consisted of a huge pot of collards, a pot of freshly stewed pork (backbone, ribs, liver, heart, red and black pepper, sage and cornbread dumplings placed on top), baked sweet potatoes, rice, cornbread and biscuits. We took turns eating since the table wasn't large enough for everyone and besides some had to remain outside to watch over the meat. What a feast for everyone that day, possibly the first day they had eaten fresh pork since last winter.

The family wash pot was used to render the fat into lard. When we got enough fat cut to fill the wash pot the process of rendering the fat would begin. My grandmother Mary or Aunt Lovie usually got the job of cooking the fat. They had a special talent of keeping the temperature at the right level and could tell exactly when the cracklins were the right shade of brown to be able to squeeze all the grease out of the meat. They also wanted to cook the lard on the right phase of the moon. They said the lard would boil over if cooked on the full moon or if the tides were rising. If this happened they would make sure the large iron pot was not as full of meat as when cooking during the decreasing moon or falling tide. The cooked meat was put in a cloth bag and squeezed with a vice made of wood. This cooked and squeezed fat became cracklins. Cracklins were salted and stored for eating with sweet potatoes or added to cornbread. The grease was put into large lard stands—cans—and stored to be used in cooking for the following year.

The hams, shoulders and side meat—or middlin (bacon)—were salted down in very heavy salt for at least six weeks. Daddy would rub the salt into the meat, stack the meat in a special tray in the smokehouse and then go back each week and rub more salt into the meat until it was "cured." About half of the middlin would be put into a wooden barrel filled with salt brine and left until needed for eating. This was called pickled pork. After he determined that the other meat was ready, the salt would be washed off and then would be hung in the smokehouse for smoking. Blades of bear grass, inserted between the heel string and bone, were used to hang the hams and shoulders in the smoke house. Smoking was done by building a small fire that did not make a blaze but smoldered with just the right amount of heat and smoke to rise up and cure the meat. This smoked meat would be preserved to be used during the rest of the winter, through the summer and into the fall.

The process of making sausage was to grind the small lean pieces of meat cut from the trimmings of the ham, shoulders and fat. The ground meat was then mixed with sage, salt and red pepper. After the sausage was forced into the casings the links would be draped over long stick and hung in the smokehouse during the night. They would be taken out during the day and hung outside to be cured by the sun. This smoking and drying process would keep the meat for several months. Sometimes Mama would put the dried sausage into the cans of lard to keep them from molding. The smoked meat would also mold, but could still be eaten because the mold was just on the outside and could be washed or cut off before cooking.

The feet were saved until the other meat was prepared. Mama would singe the hair off, remove the toenails, scrub them clean and then boil until they were tender. There wasn't much meat on them but they had a good flavor. Sometimes she would put the cooked feet in jars with vinegar to pickle them. Pickled feet and sweet potatoes made a special snack.

Hog head cheese, or souse meat, was made by mixing spices with the boiled meat of the head. The mixture was put in a cloth bag for draining away the grease. It was then sliced for eating.

Hog killing days were truly special days in the early days of my life.

1924 MURDER TRIAL OF FATHER AND SON GRIPPED REGION

C. W. Stewart and Elmer Stewart, father and son, were executed in 1924 for the murders of two law enforcement officers

By: Scott Whisnant, Regional Editor, *Star-News*, Wilmington, NC

The "trial of the century" in Brunswick County took place in 1924 and fairly overwhelmed the courthouse in Southport.

Leon George, 52, a Wilmington police detective, and Sam Lilly, 47, a U. S. Marshal, were returning from a successful raid of a bootlegger's still in the Northwest community near Wilmington on July 29, 1924, when they were gunned down on a muddy road. C. W. Stewart and his son, Elmer, were tried and convicted in October and, just seven months later, became a rare father-son combo to be executed together.

The murder, trial and execution gripped the Cape Fear area.

"The trial is almost the sole topic of discussion on the streets this afternoon," the *Morning Star* reported.

It started with something common during Prohibition—a raid on bootleggers.

George and Lilly found a still about 15 miles northwest of Wilmington. They packed the still in the back of their Ford and rode back along a dirt road, rounding a curve at the head of Bob's Branch "in one of most lonely spots imaginable," the newspaper reported.

The ambush started there. The windshield was shot out, and neither officer had time to grab his gun. George was killed in the front seat, powder burns on his face indicating he was shot at close range. Lilly's body was found behind the car in his own blood.

People living nearby heard a dog bark a few times, but "then her yelp was heard no more," the newspaper said.

Baby, the detective's Airdale dog, was shot in the back seat of the Ford.

No one counted how many shots hit the victims and the car.

"Dents on the car indicated the murderer or murderers shot with wanton abandon after the first volley that must have produced death," the newspaper reported.

As the news spread, outraged residents drove their cars into the swampy flats across the Cape Fear River, a difficult trick for many cars not built to handle the mud.

New Hanover and Brunswick counties organized a posse "armed to the teeth," the newspaper said. Acting on a tip from a 70-year-old resident, local bootlegger Elmer Stewart, 23, was arrested peacefully, the posse's guns trained on him.

C. W. Stewart, Elmer's father, arranged to turn himself in by having a friend drive him to Southport after dark. The newspaper said that the 52-year-old had been broken of his iron will, his hand trembling "like one palsied" when he shook Brunswick County Sheriff George C. Jackson's hand.

By then, about 2,000 mourners had crowded into George's funeral, and even more went to the burial. The officer, who had helped quell the race riots of 1898 and kindly had fed an escaped circus elephant peanuts to coax her back to captivity two years before his death, was remembered as a kind, even-tempered man. "A bigger and kinder heart never beat in the bosom of a man," said Nathan J. Williams, Wilmington detectives' captain.

The state's case against the Stewarts was mostly circumstantial. Several people saw the Stewarts in their car in the area around the time of the shooting, and no one denied they were bootleggers George had arrested before.

The star witness, Amos Wallace, who had spent jail time with C. W. Stewart just a few months before, said the elder Stewart confessed to him at his nearby home hours after the shooting. His account held through cross-examination at a pretrial hearing and later at trial.

The day before evidence began being heard, the *Morning Star* printed the names of the 12 jurors. In the next few days, overflow crowds, including farmers, seamen and Confederate war veterans dressed in gray, would try to get a glimpse of the proceedings. Many would settle for filing past the officers' car parked outside, still riddled with hole from pistol and shotgun rounds.

During final arguments, the Stewarts' lawyer argued that no one would take in orphan children, as the Stewarts did, would be capable of murder. After the arguments, Elmer Stewart offered to fight a deputy he thought had insulted his mother.

The case went to jury, and the following day, a Sunday, the courthouse bell peaked at 8:30 a.m.

The verdict was guilty.

The elder Stewart took it well, but the newspaper said, "Elmer forgot...his sardonic smile of supreme indifference and his ruddy face turned ashen for the moment."

The jury included with its verdict a recommendation for mercy, but Judge Henry A. Grady would have none of it. He sentenced them to be electrocuted.

The appeals lasted seven months. The judge wrote Gov. A. W. McLean, opposing anything less than death for the Stewarts. The Stewarts confessed and began learning scripture. Elmer was baptized.

Yet the execution date remained.

C. W. Stewart spent his final days saying he'd take his punishment if his son could be spared. Both wrote letters, printed in the newspaper, just before they died. "I'm sorry I have been so mean," Elmer Stewart wrote.

On April 17, 1925, C. W. Stewart went first into the execution chamber. His eyes met those of Lilly's 19-year-old son, then he smiled at Sheriff Jackson. "God bless you all," he said, before the first shock, 56 seconds long. Then another of 30 seconds and a third of 28 seconds. Finally, his body was carried off and put in a hearse.

Elmer Stewart followed his father into the room. After joking with guards struggling to strap him in—"Take your time boys, I'm in no hurry"—he began praying, "Dear Jesus, forgive them." It took just two shocks, a minute and 36 seconds total, to kill him.

They were buried at Bellevue cemetery, temporarily sharing the grounds with George's body, though the family later moved it to be with other family members. **

More than 5,000 attended, some climbing trees or rooftops to see.

** The grave of murdered police detective Leon George is in Oakdale Cemetery, marked by a tombstone that reads 'Nobly he fell while fighting for right.' Leon George was born July 16, 1872 and died July 29, 1924.

'SLEEPING SICKNESS' CLAIMS VICTIM HERE
CHARLES T. CUMBIE DIED AT TANKERSLEY YESTERDAY MORNING
BRUNSWICK COUNTY MAN HAD BEEN ILL WITH THE DISEASE FOR THREE WEEKS. FIRST AND
ONLY CASE TO APPEAR HERE

STAR, March 24, 1919, Wilmington, NC

Wilmington's first and only case of lethargic encephalitis, or "sleeping sickness" as it has now come to be generally known throughout the country, proved fatal at 5:30 o'clock yesterday morning with the death of Charles T. Cumbie, 45 year old Brunswick County man, who had been a patient with the new disease in the Tankersley hospital, this city, since March 16th.

His death was not unexpected by Dr. Tankersley and by Dr. L. E. Farthing, of Wilmington, who had been watching the case with more than the usual interest. Death came to Mr. Cumbie after three weeks illness with the disease and is said to have followed an attack of influenza suffered during the late winter at Lanvale, Brunswick County, where he had been employed at a sawmill.

He had been in a comatose state for more than a week. According to his young son, who with a friend came Saturday to see his father, the disease first manifested itself in the case of his father with a pain in the leg. This spread to other parts of the body and following a jerking nervous condition, the sick man began to relapse into unconsciousness, which decided the young man to bring his father to Wilmington. Mr. Cumbie was married and leaves a wife and several children.

The body was prepared for burial at Woolvin's funeral parlors yesterday and shipped yesterday to Bolivia, NC, whence it will be taken today to Shallotte, Brunswick County, for interment in the family burying ground, near there.

PROPOSED TAX FOR STREET IMPROVEMENT IN SOUTHPORT, NC

From: *THE SOUTHPORT LEADER*, May, 1890

The Southport Leader began publication in February, 1890. What were people doing in Southport in this year? The following is from the May, 1890 edition of the paper.

Letter to the Editor

Messrs. Editor:

Whom the gods wish to destroy they first make mad, which is a good text for the short sermon I wish to deliver.

A man or woman, I don't know which, has written you, proposing to tax the people of Southport \$300 a year for the purpose of improving the streets. Are we all to be sent to the poor house?

The streets are good enough as they are. My father and grandfather were born and raised here, and they found the streets all right for their purposes, and I don't believe "Sinbad" is any better than they were. Can't any poor man see that if you go to improving (as he called it) the streets by paving them, or putting shells on them, that he'll have to buy shoes for his children all the time? Boys ought to go barefoot, and if they do get the ground itch, it's better than corns.

But "Sinbad" says he wants to make the place attractive to strangers. How much money do the strangers pay for walking on the streets, and why do I have to pay taxes to make things look nice for other people? When I go to the circus, I have to pay money to get in.

What street does "Sinbad" expect to spend all that money on? Of course, that makes some difference. My house is worth \$250, and ten cents on the \$100 of extra taxes would cost me 25 cents a year. Does anyone suppose I am going to pay 25 cents a year to improve a street way off in some part of town where I don't go twice a year? Besides, I don't want the street improved.

I like sand—it's healthy—and my father liked it too, and I want things to stay as they were in his time.

Now, Mr. Editor, I'm down on such extravagance, and I won't vote for any man who favors it. I've been worried enough already. I can't keep a hog in the streets, without some constable is after it, and now this "Sinbad" wants to tax us to death.

If Southport votes to spend all this money, I want it all spent on the street I live on.

Signed: Taxpayer