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Pickens County Progress

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Covington Hang -- A Pickens County Civil War hanging revisited

7/3/2009 - Jeff Warren

Covington Hang—an unusual place name on the Old Federal Road south of Marble Hill. Local folklore says the spot saw a hanging during the Civil War. A band of Confederate guerrillas, it is said, captured a man named **Covington** at his home just over into Dawson County. They transported the man along the Old Federal Road into **Pickens County**, where, on a likely tree, they ended his life. Variations on the tale add horror and drama. Some tellers have the Rebels cut the tendons at the back of **Covington's** ankles, goading him to walk the full distance to the execution place. Had he hiked clear to the top of that hill where the hanging tree stood, the Confederates would have spared him, the yarners spin. Another version has other **Covington** family members present at the end: a mother begging in the road for the life of her son; **Covingtons** returning after dark to unearth a hastily buried body for reburial at a more appropriate place. The incident at **Covington Hang** dates from 1864. That being almost a century



PHOTO BY JEFF WARREN
Graves of David (left) and Ananias

Here is a copy of the article I emailed you about. Mike, Best Regards, J. Fog

and a half ago, uncovering details of what actually happened at the place makes for a difficult search.

Fortunately genealogical research of the Richard Covington family by Virginia Dial of San Diego, California sheds fresh light. Dial's version of incidents surrounding the execution is drawn from Richard Covington's Bible records and from oral history given by six Covington descendants, she said. Dial too is a Covington descendant.

According to Dial's research, Richard and Mary Covington came to Georgia from North Carolina. They lived somewhere close to the Dawson-Pickens County line in the Yellow Creek area and raised more than a dozen children. Several of these still lived with Richard and Mary on the family farm at the time of the Civil War. The day the guerrillas came calling at the Covington place, the women had already hidden the family valuables, Dial said.

"The night before, Ananias had brought David and John Howell home from the war," she said. These men were all brothers, sons of Richard and Mary. It was August 1864. David Covington was 29 years old. Older brother, John Howell, was 31. Younger brother, Ananias, was almost 22.

Ananias and David served in the same Confederate infantry company, Company D, 40th Georgia Infantry. Members of Company D called themselves the "Calhoun Blues". Most members were recruited in Gordon County.

Dial said David was working as a farm laborer for a Gordon County farmer (John Phillips) before he joined the Confederate army, and that might explain David's enlistment in a Gordon County military company.

The Roster of Confederate Soldiers of Georgia indicates Ananias Covington was the first Covington brother to join the Calhoun Blues—as a private on February 20, 1862. David Covington joined his younger brother in the company (also as a private) May 7th of the same year.

The two fought in the Confederate Army of Tennessee, battling in the western campaign theater of the war. Both men became prisoners of war July 4, 1863 when Confederates surrendered the city of Vicksburg, Mississippi to Union forces who had the place under siege.

At that stage of the war, POW's were issued a "parole", a paper document that passed them home to await an "exchange" that allowed their return to the war. In an exchange, the two governments, Union and Confederate, worked out an arrangement where a pair of captured soldiers, of about the same rank but from opposing armies, could both be returned to the fighting.

This transaction had occurred for David and Ananias Covington, and they were apparently back serving with the Confederate army in battles around Atlanta

Covington (victims of the violence surrounding Covington Hang) at Mt. Vernon Baptist Church in Dawson County



during summer 1864 just prior to their encounter with guerrillas at home on August 13.

John Howell Covington had also served with the Confederate Army of Tennessee, Dial said, but in a different unit from his two brothers. John Howell's company was Company I (a Dawson County company) of the 52nd Georgia Infantry.

According to The Roster of Confederate Soldiers of Georgia, John Howell Covington was wounded through the backbone and disabled May 16, 1863 at Baker's Creek, Mississippi, a battle in the lead-up to the Confederate loss of Vicksburg. Furloughed home, John Howell was never able to return to the war. Oral history handed down through Covington descendants says Ananias had just come home to the mountains in August 1864, bringing his two wounded brothers with him, when guerrillas showed up the next day. Confederate records (The Roster) indicate John Howell Covington had probably already been home about a year that August.

Oral history says David Covington came home with a hip wound. Maybe he suffered this wound in a battle around Atlanta (where the army was then), and his brother, Ananias brought him home to recover. Family oral history says John Howell Covington was abed inside the Covington homestead, Ananias and David on the porch with their father, when the guerrillas came calling. It was Saturday, August 13, 1864.

Given their arrival home at that time, it's possible David and Ananias participated in the Battle of Ezra Church before departing the army.

One of the battles for Atlanta, the action at Ezra Church (Thursday, July 28, 1864) played out on ground now contained in Atlanta's Westview Cemetery. The brigade to which David and Ananias belonged figured large in the battle, a clash that featured a headlong Confederate charge against a Union line, defended from entrenchments.

Of roughly 3,500 casualties at Ezra Church, 3,000 were Confederate—six Confederate casualties for each Union loss. The battle went down as a Southern defeat.

Considering the timing, David Covington could have received his hip wound at Ezra Church, July 28, making his way home (with help from his brother, Ananias) by August 12. It was August 13 when guerrilla riders rode up to the house porch at the Covington place.

They asked Richard Covington what he had they might take, Dial related. He had nothing, Richard replied. The guerrillas asked that he unbar a locked gate so they could move into another section of his land. Richard said he was too old to fool

with the riders but sent his sons, David and Ananias, Dial said. Covington oral history does not specify whether the guerrilla band involved was Union or Confederate, Dial said. Gangs of both sympathies ranged North Georgia in 1864, robbing and terrorizing locals.

The History of Cherokee County by Rev. Lloyd G. Martin includes an account of McCollum's Scouts penned by Judge William A. Covington, a kinsman to Richard Covington and his descendants. Judge Covington tags this group of scouts, Confederate partisan rangers led by Ben McCollum of Cherokee County, as the guerrilla group involved that day at the Covington farm.

But according to Dial's research, Richard Covington's family Bible contradicts Judge Covington where the judge pins responsibility for Covington Hang on Ben McCollum and his Confederates. This Bible (where births, deaths and marriages of Richard and Mary Covington's children are listed) records the deaths of David and Ananias on the same day—one shot, one hanged—as a result of the Yankees, Dial reported.

If Confederates had killed David and Ananias Covington, it would have been for being deserters from the Confederate army—absent from the fighting without a furlough. Killed by Yankees, one can guess the men were executed simply for serving on the wrong side of the fight (from a Union perspective).

The demand to have the gate unlocked was apparently just a tactic to get David and Ananias away from the house. Seeing they couldn't move David very far on his wounded leg, the guerrillas shot him dead at the gate, Dial said. Then they marched Ananias to the hill where they ended his life with a rope. Today these brothers lie buried at Mount Vernon Baptist Church on Kelly Bridge Road in west Dawson County.

Apparently unmolested inside the farmhouse the day the guerrillas came, John Howell Covington survived his wound into the next century. Dial said John Howell even gained a Confederate pension. Following Reconstruction and the return of home rule to the South, the state of Georgia paid pensions to its Confederate veterans and their widows. John Howell Covington is buried within a few feet of where David and Ananias are buried side by side.

In August 2008, Pickens County resident and octogenarian, Russell Pendley, led the way to the site of Covington Hang as pointed out to him as a boy. The place he indicated lies close to Fortner Road, still a dirt track and once a portion of the Old Federal Road.

Now on land used by a hunting club, the site is posted with no-trespassing signs. Not even a scrap remains of the old oak Pendley said served once as a hanging tree. He remembers that oak, dead on the ground from his boyhood, Pendley said,

but it's all gone now.

Only the name persists—a puzzle probably to those who don't know the story—and to those who do, maybe an assurance that the wartime terror once real hereabouts happened a long time ago.



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