

Old Man Of The Smokies Granville Calhoun Dies

John Parris, Asheville Citizen, May 8, 1978

Granville Calhoun, the legendary one-time Squire of Hazel Creek, is dead at the age of 103 years.

Death came to the grand old man of the Great Smokies early Sunday morning at his home here in Bryson City as his tired old heart finally gave out while he slept.

He was the last surviving link to that pioneer past when the venerable temple of the Great Smokies was a virgin land and homesteads were rough-hewn out of wilderness.

Until the very last, even though his speech was blurred from a slight stroke a few years ago, his mind could still weave a tapestry of mountain life that spanned an era from homespun to polyester.

Funeral services for the old man will be held at 2 p.m. Tuesday in the First Baptist Church of Bryson City of which he was a member, with the Rev. Willie Newman officiating. Burial will be in the Bryson City Cemetery beside his wife, Lillie Hall Calhoun, who died in 1943.

Surviving are a daughter, Mrs. Pauline Kindley, and a son, Seymour Calhoun, both of the home, and five grandchildren, five great-grandchildren, and five great-great grandchildren.

The family, which will receive friends from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. Monday at the Bill Moody Funeral Home here, has requested that in lieu of flowers donations be made to the Masonic Orphanage, or the church or charity of one's choice.

The old man was born March 14, 1875 in a log cabin just four miles east of the mouth of Hazel Creek at a place called Wayside where a hand-poled ferry crossed the little Tennessee and where his grandfather ran a store and was postmaster.

His father put down roots there in 1869 and it was where his father grew up and was married.

Granville's father was Joshua Calhoun, a man of God by calling and a farmer by necessity, who spent his life preaching and laboring in the dark wrinkles of the hills for the betterment of his neighbors.

When Granville was just nine years old – “just a little fellow in homespun jeans” – his father hewed out the first wagon track into the wilderness and moved the family to the headwaters of Hazel Creek where they settled into a two-room log cabin.

It was wild country back then, Granville often recalled. All virgin timber. Wolves still prowled the hills. The streams were full of speckled trout and there was a world of game – bear and deer and turkeys and squirrels.

Granville was a famous bear hunter of his time. He started hunting when he was barely big enough to tote a gun, and he hunted bear for 60 years in the Smokies.

Over the years he came to know the Smokies as few men ever knew them.

When he was 17 years old, the first of a horde of lumbermen came into the Smokies and built splash dams on Hazel Creek to float out the virgin timber they cut.

Granville went to work for them, helping to cruise timber and tend to two of the splash dams on the creek.

Two years later he got married and built a one-room log cabin between Walker's Creek and Proctor Creek.

Shortly after the turn of the century, he turned the first shovelful of dirt for the Smoky Mountain Railroad which was chartered to carry passengers and freight up Hazel Creek while the logging trains ran right to the top of the Smokies.

For a while he worked on the passenger train as conductor.

The lumber boom created the town of Proctor at the mouth of the Creek and Granville moved in and built himself a fine house that still stands today and is used as a ranger station by the park service.

In its heyday, Proctor revolved around a gigantic bandmill that turned out 100,000 board feet of timber daily and boasted a population of better than a thousand people.

Granville had a store and theater at Proctor and ran the post office.

Meanwhile, he acquired considerable land and when the Great Smoky Mountains National Park was established and he was forced to move out in 1946 he owned 17 houses in the Hazel Creek section.

He was the last to move out of the area, staying there "until everything was cleared out and the country left to the bears."

In his time, Granville hunted and fished the Smokies, herded cattle on the high tops, and rambled about the entire region until he knew the Smokies like the palm of his hand.

In 1919, he introduced rainbow trout into Hazel Creek.

And it was Granville who welcomed a sick Horace Kephart to the Smokies in 1902 (sic) and nursed him back to health and introduced him to the mountains and the people he came to write about.

During his years on Hazel Creek, Granville worked tirelessly to bring good roads and schools into the region and served for many years as school committeeman.

After moving to Bryson City, he became famous for his memories of Hazel Creek and writers from far and near sought him out for his rare knowledge of the Smokies.

In his time, Granville Calhoun walked tall as the mountains of his birth.

And even though he has passed on, he will not be forgotten.

He will live in the stories he told and the legends he made.