

WHITE HORN PLANTATION HOME OF WILLIAM "OLD BILLY" GRIGSBY

The slaughterhouse is gone. So are the spring houses, loading docks and upping blocks.

The old store has been converted into apartments. The farm has been jived up to a state of super production. And even the old house has undergone some pretty earth-shattering changes.

The old, old creek is probably the most unchangeable characteristic of White Horn. And while the place has probably never been labeled as such, the little Hawkins County settlement just northeast of Bulls Gap could, for all intents and purposes, be called Grigsbysville.

It has been the Grigsbys who have been the spark of the community, and the old Grigsby home has been the hub around which the entire settlement rotates.

It was the Grigsbys who operated the slaughterhouse, the loading docks, the store, the post office, freight office, depot and most everything else that was operable.

But the Grigsbys, like the water of the rippling little creek that is the namesake of the community, have moved on. Many have died. Most of the remaining ones have scattered to other places, giving way to new names and new faces.

The place, however, will never outlive the mark left by this single family who left a legacy of almost unbelievable respect.

The respect started with the coming of the white man to the place. The respect hasn't ended yet, though the place is virtually without a Grigsby.

Five generations of Grigsbys made White Horn a familiar sounding name in east Tennessee from the time they first settled there. The two names -- White Horn and Grigsby -- were one and the same until the early 1950's when the old place was sold, severing the name that had been identified with the land since the buckskin days of the 1780's.

Many of the community's present populace knew or have heard of the family but some know very little; only that "a bunch of Grigsbys used to live around here".

This article was copied from the Greenville Sun, of Greenville, Tennessee for June 15th, 1974. It was distributed to the Tennessee John Grigsby Association (see pg. 150 of Memorabilia I) in June of 1982. It was sent to us by John W. Grigsby of Knoxville, Tennessee.

Most of the folks who rubbed elbows daily with any of the five generations are no longer around. There are, however, a few who can still vividly recall a fourth generation Grigsby who is perhaps the best known from all the ranks of the respectable family line.

His name was Joseph Anderson Grigsby -- J. A. to some, Mr. Joe to some, and Captain to others. It made no difference what they called him, it all meant the same thing.

It meant White Horn. It meant anything they needed in the way of supplies for the home or farm. It meant true friendship and an honored relationship between buyer and seller.

His business enterprise has been called the only real industry in South Hawkins County in the late 1800's and during the early years of this century.

There is no nutshell summary in describing his business. He not only sold everything imaginable under the sun, he bought everything imaginable under the sun.

He was paid by the railroad as a ticket, freight, express, and depot agent. He was paid by Uncle Sam as the postmaster. He was the community's banker, agricultural advisor, sociologist, meat packer, welfare agent, plus a few other things.

In his spare time, he and his wife spark-plugged the church that his father helped organize -- Mt. Pleasant Methodist.

In addition, he was chairman of the Hawkins County Board of Education for many years and served on the board of trustees at Tennessee Wesleyan and the University of Chattanooga.

When he wasn't busy doing any of those chores, he was making a reputation in two less stringent categories that are still well remembered. One was a laugh that could be heard a mile away, and the other had to do with an over-active right hand that couldn't be still, even while it was in his pocket. Every time his right hand entered his right pocket, the sound of jingling change would echo through White Horn.

The fact that he was on the board of trustees of two major colleges in Tennessee gives some insight into how well Mr. Joe was known throughout the state.

His advice was sought by folks from varied walks of life, from college presidents to sharecroppers. It was the sharecroppers, however, who won the majority of his time and energy. He spent much of his free time developing plans in order to help them. Though not officially a banker, he would keep their money for them, issuing due bills when he received cash for deposit.

He was constantly on the lookout for crops that they could raise inexpensively and sell for a good profit. He persuaded lots of them to grow onions and he shipped them off to eastern markets in train-car-loads.

Eggs and poultry were two more Grigsby specialties. He preached that big demand for eggs in the big cities on the eastern seaboard was a built-in guarantee of good prices. The farmers heeded his word, too, and hundreds of cases of eggs left the Grigsby shipping dock every week.

As a meat packer, he was known far and wide. His country ham and country sausage were shipped all over the country. The finest restaurants in the nation sought his hams as well as his eggs and turkeys.

Over 100 hogs were killed some days during the peak of his slaughterhouse operation. Most of the men in the community were hired to do the heavy work at hog-killing time while most of the women were hired to make and bag sausage and render lard.

Mr. Joe bought hogs and turkeys all over Hawkins County. If his margin of profit turned out to be exceptional, he shared it with the farmers from whom he made his purchases, sending them a second check.

And as a storekeeper, he refused to mark up the price of items until he was forced to. During World War II, when many merchants marked up items that they knew were going up, Mr. Joe steadfastly refused to.

For a wife, Captain Grigsby persuaded a Georgia peach, Annie Laurie Julian from Graysville, Ga., to meet him at the wedding altar. The knot was tied so tight that their marriage turned into a life-long story of love, honor, respect and success.

While he was successful as a farmer, merchant, shipper, agent, educator and churchman, he and Mrs. Joe counted their five children as their greatest trophy of all.

Education had a special place in the hearts of the Grigsby parents. Both had been deprived of a good education while growing up during the years when the smoke from the Civil War was still clearing. So they determined long before the time came that their five children would be given the opportunity to obtain all the education they wanted to strive for.

As a result, four of the five graduated from college, two obtaining masters degrees. The fifth dropped out of college to volunteer for service in World War I.

His death in 1944 and her's in 1951 marked the close of an era at White Horn that is still warmly remembered by a handful of their associates.

Their passing left a vacancy in the community where they worked a lifetime; but their good works, their kind ways, and their warm spirit cast such a long shadow that traces are still felt and seen there.

Their success has been credited with prompting dozens of other success stories. Their story of love for each other, for their children and for all of White Horn created a living testimony of honor and devotion that others are still copying.

Their idea of honesty and fair play in the business world had a great influence on other businessmen who had never thought a great deal about fair play until the Grigsbys came along.

While they were traveling the White Horn way, they perhaps never gave a thought to the giant shadows they were casting. Then, on the other hand, maybe they did.

While a daughter is credited with naming it, the parents never once objected to her choice of words -- Shadowland.

COPIED FROM THE GREENEVILLE SUN, GREENEVILLE, TENNESSEE JUNE 15,
1974