



Old Man Owen
Adkins of Turkeycock
Mountain

HIS LIFE & TIMES

Introduction

In the winter of 1878, over roads muddied by thawing snow and heavy rains, a writer from the New York Herald traveled by buggy the thirty plus miles from Danville to the foot of Turkeycock Mountain. Arriving by night, he determined to seek out the object of his journey the next morning. About sunrise he approached the old man's dilapidated, odd-shaped, old house only to be informed that the old man was already out on the mountain turkey hunting. Determined not to squander an opportunity to interview the old man, the writer decided to spend the day in the neighborhood and await his return.

The story related by the writer of his meeting with Owen Adkins is truly remarkable. Legends of this man have persevered through the ages and many of them may well be traced to that very meeting and the subsequent publication of the stories related therein.

Not only was this story published in the New York Herald, but excerpts and edited versions of it were picked up and printed by newspapers all over the United States and even as far away as Australia. Some papers, like The Independent, of Elkhart County, Indiana printed only a few lines, while others, like the Sedalia Weekly Bazoo, in Missouri, ran much lengthier versions.

The pages that follow contain an exact transcription of the original article as published in the New York Herald on Saturday, March 2, 1878, made from an original issue of the newspaper recently obtained from a rare newspaper dealer. Wherever practicable, the formatting, layout, style and spelling of the original publication have been maintained.

Following the New York Herald article is an excerpt from The Richmond Dispatch that was printed about two months before Owen's death in 1885.

Chris W. Hanks

June 6, 2014

A MODERN PATRIARCH.

The Living Progenitor of Five Hundred and Fifty Persons.

A MORMON WITHOUT A REVELATION.

An Athlete and Mighty Hunter at Ninety-six.

LIFE IN THE VIRGINIA MOUNTAINS.

Horse Racing, Card Playing, Fox Hunting and Running Contests.

Adkintown, Pittsylvania County, Va. Feb. 27, 1878.

Pittsylvania county, Va., has for a great number of years enjoyed considerable notoriety as being the native place of some most remarkable characters, but by far the most interestingly remarkable man that this or any other county has ever produced is "Old Man Owen Adkins, of Turkey Cock Mountain," whose peculiar moral views, embracing and taking in as they do Mormonism and free love; whose almost incredible physical abilities and remarkable powers of endurance; whose oddities and queer habits, and whose unprecedentedly great number of offspring all combine to make him an object of interest in the limited circle of his acquaintance.

HIS BIRTH AND EARLY LIFE.

Owen Adkins was born on the 25th of December, 1782, and is consequently now in his ninety-sixth year. His parents were very poor and illiterate people of the lower stratum of society, who made a scanty living by hunting and fishing on and around the two beautiful

little mountains between which they resided. They had seven children - five boys and two girls - Owen being the third son. Unlettered and ignorant themselves, the parents neither knew nor cared to appreciate the advantages of education, and therefore their children were also reared in blissful ignorance. Young Owen in early life showed signs of some very decided traits of character, affording evidence of the fact that in point of hard common sense he was not only greatly the superior of his brothers and sisters, but also of his parents. Though small in stature he was the "strongest boy on the mountains" and very fleet of foot, displaying at the same time remarkable powers of endurance and inexhaustible "wind," having the capacity in a long distance over hill and dale to compete in a race with an ordinary horse. His father, noticing these peculiarities, turned them to good account, and always carried young Owen with him to public gatherings and there made him wrestle with larger boys, run foot races, and often compete with slow horses for such wagers as the old man could raise. In this way the father won much money, taking in at one time the sum of \$50, the amount of a bet on a foot race of five miles against time, the boy making the distance in twenty-six minutes. He was at that time only twelve years of age. The boy, as a matter of course, took great pride in these wonderful powers and successful exploits, and enjoyed the notoriety which they gave him as only a wild mountain boy could.

A TERRIBLE FIGHT WITH A BEAR.

In those early days Turkey Cock and Smith Mountains were noted far and near for the great variety of game to be found on and about them. Deer, bears and wildcats, which are now strangers in that section, were then as numerous as squirrels and wild turkeys are today, and bear
and

deer hunting were the favorite and most profitable sports, but were also exceedingly dangerous, and for that reason all the more fascinating to the young huntsman. Owen was always anxious to try his metal on a bear, but his father, knowing the danger, forbade his attempting a bear hunt alone. This, however, did not allay the boy's great desire, and one morning in the spring of the year he surreptitiously procured his father's rifle and all alone started up the mountain side in hopes of meeting Bruin. Soon his wish was gratified, for as he scaled a forbidding looking ledge he stood face to face with a large black bear, which seemed to have met him there by appointment. The boy at once emptied the contents of the rifle at his bearship and struck him in one of his forelegs; but this only served to enrage the animal, and he at once clasped young Adkins in his tight embrace. The rifle, being unloaded, was of no service, and a large jack knife was the only weapon left the boy for defense; but with the aid of that, his almost superhuman strength and his great activity he finally, conquered, and the dead body of Bruin, with his jugular vein severed, lay at the boy's feet. Owen, however, was badly used up, his shoulder and arm being severely bitten and his face and breast terribly lacerated. Owen Adkins for a great number of years kept the hide of that animal, and greatly delighted in showing visitors the skin of a bear that he killed when "he was a little chunk of a boy, just fourteen years old." Owen learned to use a shotgun or rifle with unerring accuracy when he was very young, and has ever been regarded as a "crack shot." In his own language, "he never was afeard of nothin', but always after the bar fight preferred to tackle them varmints at rifle range."

In the spring of 1805, when Owen was in his twentythird year, he married and built a house to himself within one hundred feet of the house in which he was born, where he still lives. His life with his first wife was, for five years or more, a very happy one, and might have continued so to the end but for peculiar ideas on the subject of marriage which, by some means, worked themselves into his brain and caused him to publicly proclaim his moral right to have as many wives as he wished.

MORMONISM WITHOUT THE CHURCH.

Now this man never heard of Brigham Young and Mormonism, and long before the Mormon doctrine was proclaimed by Joseph Smith and his followers Owen Adkins had views and opinions which coincide exactly with the polygamy portion of Joseph Smith's and Brigham Young's creed. He believes that while the laws of the land allow him to have only one wife at a time there is no moral law which prohibits him having as many as he may wish, provided he properly supports them and their offspring. In accordance with this then peculiar idea of his he, about five years after his marriage, took unto himself three concubines, for each of whom he built comfortable houses, all within one mile of his own residence. His first wife did not agree with her husband on the subject of polygamy, and from that time until her death there was no peace in that family. The concubines could agree among themselves, but the wife hated the concubines as only a spirited woman who believes her rights to have been invaded can hate.

This wife died in 1830, after having borne her husband nineteen children, all of whom are now living. Within four months after her death the old man married a second time. His second wife had no objection to polygamy and lived in peace and apparent happiness with husband and concubines. A few years after the second marriage the old man took one more concubine. His second wife lived only a few years, dying in 1839 after bearing five children, four of whom still survive.

Mr. Adkins never married after the death of his second wife, but lived with his four concubines until the last one died, about twenty-two years ago, when he took another woman to be a concubine, but has never married her. She still lives with him, and is as kind, obedient and attentive to him as though she were wife instead of concubine.

MORE CHILDREN THAN BRIGHAM YOUNG.

Mr. Adkins' two lawful wives bore him twenty-four children, and his concubines aggregated forty-six, making in all seventy children, sixty-six of whom are now living, only four out of this large number of children having died. His oldest child, a son by his first wife, is now seventy-one years old, and lives within a short distance of his father. He also has a very large family, but does not agree with his paternal ancestor in regard to polygamy. The old gentleman's second child (a daughter) is nearly seventy years of age. She has been the mother of twelve children, only one of whom has died. All of his children that are married and settled,

except one, have large families, and it is therefore quite certain that old man Owen Adkins' offspring, including living children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, number somewhere near five hundred and fifty. Nearly all of this tremendous family live right around the old gentleman within a radius of five miles, and the neighborhood has therefore taken the name of Adkintown, by which it is known throughout that section of the country.

ADKINTOWN.

Adkintown is situated in the valley between the Turkey Cock and Pine Mountains, and is a wild looking, thinly settled country, bounded on every side by beautiful picturesque mountain ranges, which are covered with dense and grand forests. It is three miles from Museville, Pittsylvania County, fifteen from Chatham, the county seat, and thirtyone from Danville. The neighboring hills and mountains abound in a great variety of game, such as squirrels, hares, opossums, partridges, quails, pheasants, wild turkeys, &c., and it is also a great fox hunting country. Some of the Adkins family are well-to-do farmers, and have amassed fair fortunes cultivating the finer grades of tobacco, to which the soil in that section is particularly adapted, but most of them follow in the footprints of the great head of the generation, and give their attention more to hunting, horse racing and card playing, by which means most of them make a living.

POLITICS.

It is hardly necessary to inform the intelligent reader that so large a family as is this of Adkin town was regarded by politicians as being of no small importance about election times. Old man Owen Adkins always controlled the votes of the entire family, and for a period of several years previous to the war political parties were so evenly divided in Pittsylvania County that the old man actually held the balance of power and could always name the successful candidate. Mr. Adkins took sides with no party, for while he was always well posted on public questions and discussed them with remarkable intelligence for a man of his attainment, he always gave his vote and influence for purely personal considerations-not that his vote had a price upon it, for in those days buying votes was a line of business unknown in this country; but he gave his influence in favor of the candidate (Whig or democrat) who held the most exalted position on the old man's list of personal friends, not caring a farthing what the candidate's views on any subject might be. Such being his politics he was greatly sought after and petted by aspirants for political preferment. Since the war the old gentleman has rather lost the run of politics. New politicians, unknown to him, have sprung up; new questions that he does not comprehend have arisen, and, in short, politics have been so thoroughly revolutionized that he seems to be perfectly at sea, has become disgusted, and scarcely ever goes to the polls to deposit a vote.

HORSE RACING AND CARD PLAYING.

In antebellum days horse racing was the favorite and principal recreation of Virginia sporting men and there was a well arranged race course at or near almost every country village and voting precinct in the State. Owen Adkins was a great admirer of race horses and never lost an opportunity to attend a race. He would always be very forward and loud in expressing his judgment on the merits or demerits of the different courses and was ever ready and anxious to "back his judgment" with his last cent. He was so perfect a judge of horseflesh that his winnings generally largely exceeded his losses, but should he attend a race and have "a bad run of luck" and at night find himself a loser he would at once find someone with sufficient boldness to sit with him at draw poker for fifty cents a game and just as surely as the sun rose the next morning it would find the old Mormon "flush" and ready for another horse race.

FOOT RACING.

Mr. Adkins was never a thrifty farmer. He owned a very valuable tract of land and would add to it as his children grew up and settled upon it; but he devoted too much attention to hunting, fishing and horse racing to make himself a successful tiller of the soil. He, therefore, never made his farm produce enough to supply the wants of his unprecedently large and constantly increasing family, and he had to provide means to supply the deficiency. This he did by gambling on the race course, card playing and hunting; but his "best hold" was foot racing, upon which he prided himself not a little. He was, as before mentioned, very fleet, and being

endowed with unheard of endurance and possessing the wind of a camel he never found a successful competitor in a foot race, though he has met with hundreds of men who had the hardihood to try their mettle with him. He would always bet as largely as his purse would admit on his foot races, but most generally these trials of speed and physical endurance would be gotten up by the sporting fraternity by providing a purse for the successful competitor. The most remarkable foot race ever recorded was won by this old man in the year 1834 when he was sixty-two years of age. A young man named Wesley Balling, twentyfour years old, was his opponent and the distance was eleven miles over the old Franklin turnpike from Collands, in Pittsylvania County, to Happen Creek, in Franklin County. Balling gave out on the sixth mile, but Adkins ran the entire distance, making the eleven miles according to his own statement "in one hour lacking two minutes."

A graphic account of this race was published at the time in the American Turf Register, which says Adkins made the eleven miles in forty-one minutes; but the old gentleman avers that that account is not correct as regards the time, but that his statement of it is true. A one hundred dollar wager and a fifty dollar purse was won by him on this his most celebrated foot race.

In all of his many foot races the longer the distance ran the surer he was of winning, relying more on his wind and physical endurance than upon his fleetness of foot. He has been successful in more than five hundred of these old time and once very popular contests, and is not loath now at ninety-six years of age to engage in his favorite sport.

FOX HUNTING.

Mr. Adkins in very early life, like most boys of his day, became very fond of fox hunting, and can now relate incidents of some of the most remarkable chases on record. He always, up to a few years back, kept a fine pack of hounds, and his house used to be the place of rendezvous of all the hunters of the neighborhood whenever a grand chase was on the tapis. The old man would never ride after

Reynard had been jumped, but would at once tie his horse and continue the chase on foot, and being familiar with all the near cuts and bypaths of the country would see much more of the chase than any of his companions who would remain on horseback, and he was never known to fail to be with the dogs at the "catch." It is related of him that while thus on foot he would keep so near the dogs that he invariably overtook them when a high fence to be climbed would temporarily impede the progress of the pack, and he has often been seen throwing the dogs, one by one, over the fence in order that they might hurry on and press the fox home.

A VISIT TO MR. ADKINS.

In order that somewhat of a history of this most remarkable old man should be presented to the readers of the Herald a representative was sent to visit him at his home in the mountains. The trip from Danville, Va., by buggy to the foot of the Turkey Cock Mountain was the work of a whole day, the mountain roads being in a miserable condition on account of the recent heavy rains and the more recent thawing of the

snow on the mountain sides, but by dint of perseverance and hard driving I arrived in the Adkins neighborhood by night, and the next morning went to the old gentleman's house about sunrise. At that early hour I failed to find him. He was out on the mountain side hunting wild turkeys, and I was informed by his wife, or rather his concubine, that he would not return until about night. I then made up my mind to spend the day in Adkintown and await the old gentleman's return.

THE PATRIARCH'S HOME.

The Adkins mansion and surroundings are not very inviting. The house is situated about equidistant from the foot of the Turkey Cock Mountain and Piney Peak (which is a spur of the Smith Mountain), in a low valley that just at that point is destitute of any scenery calculated to relieve its weird, desolate appearance. The house is a very old one, having been built in the year 1803, and is odd shaped, queer and old-timey, and it, together with all the outhouses and fencing, seem to be in an advanced stage of dilapidation. The house in which Owen Adkins was born stood within 100 feet of where his present home now stands, a crumbling pile of stone and dirt being the only monuments left to mark the spot. On my arrival at the old patriarch's home the only occupant of the house was a woman who represents the old gentleman's last and only surviving concubine. She has been with him nearly twenty-three years. During the day I visited many of the Adkins progeny, most of whom live within a radius of five or six miles around their venerable progenitor's home, and attempted to take down the names of his children,

grandchildren and greatgrandchildren there found, but I used up all the vacant space in my note book without half accomplishing my object. About four o'clock P. M. I returned to "the old man's" house, and within a few moments the seventh Mrs. Adkins was heard to exclaim, "The old man is coming."

ANOTHER RIP VAN WINKLE.

I looked out and thought I saw Jefferson going to town after the twenty years' sleep in the drama of "Rip Van Winkle." "Old man Owen Adkins," ninety-six years old, with long, flowing, snow white hair away down on his shoulders, with head erect and not a tremor in his step, with two wild turkey gobblers (slain that day) over his left shoulder, and a long, clean, heavy rifle in his hand, was coming down the path, returning from a day's tramp over a rugged mountain, where he had been for - game? no! but to gratify an inherent love for sport and woodcraft that will die in his breast only when the soul of Owen Adkins has left his body and taken its everlasting night to that undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveller returns.

After passing the usual salutations I explained to him the object of my visit and the nature of my business. The idea of having his life published pleased him much, and he therefore conversed very freely with me for several hours, and made me acquainted with most of the foregoing facts. The old gentleman's recollection of events of the past few years is very dim and indistinct, but anything that occurred more than five or six years ago he relates with a precision and carefulness of detail that at once convinces the hearer not only of the truth of what he is relating, but also of the fact that he has a most remarkable memory.

HIS PERSONAL APPEARANCE AND MANNER.

Old Adkins is just five feet seven inches in height; he has broad shoulders and the widest and most prominent chest I ever saw on any man. His eye is a pale blue (paled probably by age), set back under a slightly protruding, but very broad and intellectual looking forehead. These, with a large Roman nose and a small mouth and thin, pale lips, present a face that is very pleasant to look upon, and plainly shows that its owner is and has ever been a good natured, whole souled and generous man. It also indicates perseverance, endurance, energy and an indomitable will. His arms are long and well formed, with a muscle that indicates great strength, while his hands and his feet are small, and delicately and beautifully formed. His hair is long, wavy and tails gracefully over his shoulders, and, being as white as snow, gives him a very patriarchal appearance. Taken altogether he is a very fine and noble looking old man.

HIS HABITS.

Mr. Adkins, though wild and raised among a rough class, never contracted the habit of drinking to excess. He takes his "toddlies," but says he does not remember ever having been under the influence of intoxicating liquors, nor has he ever used tobacco in any way, shape or form. He is an early riser; the first dawning of day scarcely ever finds him in bed, though he is fond of sitting up late at night and seldom retires sooner than eleven o'clock. He does not now pretend to do any work on his farm himself unless his unmarried son, who still lives with him, gets behindhand with the "crap," and then he handles a plough or

hoe as well as any hand in the field. His entire time is spent visiting his progeny and in hunting and fishing.

Mr. Adkins during his whole life has never been induced to go far from his home or remain away long at a time. He says he has not been ten miles from home in twenty-five years. A party of gentlemen endeavored to induce him to go to the Centennial in 1876, but he declined the most enticing offers.

HE WANTS TO RUN A FOOT RACE.

While talking with him last night I asked him to tell me about his celebrated eleven mile foot race. With a peculiar kind of laugh he said, "It wasn't much of a race," and then he proceeded with a nicety of detail that astounded me, to relate every incident of that remarkable contest, and closed his narrative as follows:- "Ah! 'twas wind, sir; I had better wind than the other man had, and I have got it now. I can best you a five mile race tonight." I told him I doubted it. "Ah!" he replied, "you don't know me. I've got the wind. You could beat me a few hundred yards, or maybe a mile; but in five miles wind sir would tell, and I'd beat you. At any rate I am ready to bet on it."

PROUD OF HIS CHILDREN.

I asked him if it was a fact that he was the father of over sixty living children. Said he, evidently slightly misunderstanding me, "Who says I ain't got but sixty children. Go to the records; the records show that I am the father of seventy children, four of them are dead, that leaves sixty-six now living, and I expect there are some ten or twelve more that

ain't on the records. I have over six hundred connections, and, sir, all my children and grandchildren resemble me. You can look at them sir, and see that Adkins blood flows in their veins, and I am proud of it."

I asked him how far he thought he walked during the day while out turkey hunting. He said he "had only taken a small hunt, walked probably twenty miles in all," and he then added, "it is too muddy to walk much now. When the mountain is dry I go much farther."

AMBITIOUS TO BE A CENTENARIAN.

I inquired of him as to what particular cause, if any, he attributed his unusual length of life. He replied:- "Well, you see there are a heap of causes. I would never live cramped up. I'd always take plenty of room and lots of exercise. I never eat fancy doings, but good, wholesome food; never drank too much, never used tobacco in any form, and then, sir, I'm naturally tough, but, sir, I've lived most long enough; however I am anxious to reach a hundred; then, I think, I'd die satisfied."

GOOD EYES, BUT BAD EARS.

"Mr. Adkins," said I, "how do you manage to shoot so well? Can you see to take aim?" He replied, "I can shoot better than I could twenty years ago, and I have the best pair of eyes that ever set in man's head. I never wore a pair of spectacles in my life, and I can see now much better than some of my older children can, but my ears are bad. I've been getting deafer and deafer for the last twenty years." Persons in talking with him have to speak very loud.

Taken altogether Owen Adkins is the most remarkable man now living. His recollections of early times, his reminiscences of hunting and sporting times, his own narration of his romantic and wild exploits, his original and ready way of telling them all combine to make him a most interesting person to converse with.

While engaged in this long conversation with the Herald representative, there was not a tremor in his voice, he spoke clearly, distinctly and rapidly, and very frequently he would place his hand on my knee as we sat together and I never was able to feel the slightest quiver of tremor in his hand. His every faculty seems to be in full play, and as he is in no way diseased, having never had a physician to attend him in his life, I verily believe his desire to reach a hundred years will be gratified.

I bade the venerable old patriarch farewell about eleven o'clock at night after promising to "write him up good" and send him a copy of the Herald containing his history.

EARLY RECOLLECTIONS.

Mr. Adkins' recollections of events of his childhood are very vivid and he can sit for hours and relate stirring accounts of boyish pranks and mischievous acts, and his accounts of them are so perfect in detail, and the relation of them seems to afford the old gentleman so much amusement, that one cannot for a moment doubt a single word that he utters.

WASHINGTON AND THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR.

Mr. Adkins says when a boy, and until he became grown, he often heard his father and other old people speak of General

Washington and the war, and when he was quite young he presumed from their accounts that the war was a general blowing up with gunpowder of the entire country or something worse, and that General Washington was the largest, most powerful and most generally to be feared institution ever heard of. For a long time it was a very difficult matter for him to understand that Washington was really a man and not some powerful machine to grind people to powder. So exaggerated were the tales that old people who had seen him and heard him speak would tell that a youthful mind like Mr. Adkins' was then would very readily take Washington to be some powerful giant who could and who frequently did crush hundreds of British or Indians much more easily than Samson disposed of a large number of Philistines. As Mr. Adkins grew older he understood better the nature of the "Father of his Country," but he says that while he remembers well hearing old people tell many wonderful things about Washington, he cannot now remember their sayings with sufficient distinctness to relate them connectedly.

THE WAR OF 1812.

The old gentleman's recollections of the war of 1812 are very interesting, though he does not remember dates and names of places very well. Mr. Adkins is not a war man. He does not believe in fighting, and says he always swore he would never go into a battle, and, therefore, he being at the breaking out of the second war with England a young, strong, vigorous and athletic young man, very much feared that his country would demand his services, which it did by drafting him. However, substitutes were plentiful and Mr. Adkins hired one for whose services he paid \$160 in hard money. This substitute was in a few months placed on the sick list and finally died. "Since which time," Mr. Adkins laughingly remarks, "I have been dead to all wars and never have fought."

NOT A DESERTER.

Some of the old man's neighbors say that they have often heard that he deserted from the army during that war, but he says the report is untrue and gained circulation in this way:-Soon after the death of the substitute the British made a successful campaign, took several towns and there was much talk of an invasion of Virginia. On this account soldiers were in great demand and the enrolling officers tried to force the young athlete into the "home guards," notwithstanding the fact that he was, as a soldier-to use his own language-"dead as the devil's door nail and buried on Turkey Cock Mountain." He therefore swore he would desert if he was carried to the war, and in order that he might be sure of not getting within shooting distance of the enemy he took to the

woods before the officers decided whether he was "a dead man" or not and always afterward evaded the enrolling officers when they happened around in his neighborhood, and thus the report that he was a deserter originated.

Mr. Adkins says when the news that General Jackson had won the victory at New Orleans, which virtually put a stop to hostilities, reached his section, there was great rejoicing among the people, and none were louder in their exclamations of joy than himself, "For," he laughingly adds, "I knew the time had come for me to stop dodging enrolling officers and go on attending to my business and hunting whenever and wherever I pleased."

WAR PRICES IN 1812-1815.

The old gentleman, as before stated in this article, was never a thrifty farmer, and always had to buy most of his supplies. He has therefore been well posted on prices for many, many years back.

The following quotations from the "price current" for the years 1812-1815 as recorded in his memory may prove interesting:- Corn, \$3 per bushel; wheat, \$5 to \$7 per bushel; bacon, forty to fifty cents per pound; sugar, \$1 per pound; coffee, \$4 per pound; whiskey, "too blamed high for any man of my means to get a taste," and other things in proportion.

"In those days," says Mr. Adkins, "tobacco was the circulating medium. The crude weed was taken in exchange for everything and answered the same purpose as money."

Strange to say, the value of tobacco was not enhanced by the war, but the contrary effect was experienced, and therefore (the weed being low and all eatables being high) the people in the back country suffered no little, and loud were their murmurings against the government, and great were their rejoicings when the war closed."

DESERTERS' CAVES AND GRAVES.

Mr. Adkins says the Turkey Cock and Smith mountains were favorite hiding places for deserters during the war of 1812, and there are now many caves on the sides and in the gorges of these mountains, made there and lived in by deserters from both the American and British armies. There are also two graves near a deep ravine in the Turkey Cock Mountain in which rest the last remains of men who deserted their flag and died in the woods, unhonored, unwept and unsung. Mr. Adkins, as he says, assisted at the burial of one of them. After the war was over Mr. Adkins tried to ascertain where these men were from and where and who were their friends, with a view of having the remains carried to their homes and decently interred, but he entirely failed in his most laudable efforts. These same caves were used during the late civil war between the states for the same unpatriotic purposes by both blue and gray-coated soldiery.

JOHN RANDOLPH, OF ROANOKE.

Mr. Adkins was a great admirer of Mr. Randolph and has often walked fifty, seventy-five and even a hundred miles to hear him speak. He was during one of the Presidential campaigns very much disgusted with the avowed sentiments of both of the candidates for the Chief Magistracy of the nation, and vowed he would vote for neither of them, and not only that, but would also keep as many of his friends and children as possible from voting for them. This threat was carried into execution and on election day over one hundred votes were cast in Pittsylvania county for "John Randolph, of Roanoke, for President and Vincent Witcher for Vice President." This was the old man's ticket and he worked as hard for it as if he really believed there was a good chance to elect it.

EARLY DAY SPORTS.

In Mr. Adkins' younger days the sports of the time were in many respects different from the tricks of the sporting fraternity of today. Keno, faro and roulette were unknown. Poker was the favorite game at cards, of which the old gentleman was a perfect master. Horse racings and match shootings were, of course, exceedingly popular, while foot racing was indulged in by all who had sufficient power of endurance. Old man Adkins always won considerable money at shooting matches, he being one of the best, if not the best, shot with a rifle in his section.

His mode of training for a shooting match is very probably new to every reader of the Herald, but may be sensible nevertheless.

He would not sleep a wink the night before the match, in order, as he says, that his nerves and his pulse might be weak the next day, and then he could hold his rifle steady, and in order that he might see clearly he would put a few small grains of gunpowder in each of his eyes about ten hours before the shooting was to come off. Another favorite sport in those days was "dollar pitching," which consisted in pitching silver dollars at a stake put up in the ground at a given distance (generally thirty or forty feet), and the person whose dollar fell nearest to the stake became the owner of all the coins pitched. This game, by constant practice, was by some reduced to a science, and very exciting and close have been the contests between artistic pitchers at times. Mr. Adkins was a very professional pitcher, and has frequently won as high as \$ 100 or \$200 in one afternoon. He says he has frequently had to pitch with a proficient opponent as often as a hundred times before it could be decided which was the winner, they both being so accurate that for a hundred trials each one's coin would fall as near the stake as it was possible for it to get, and a "tie" would be the constant result.

DURING THE REBELLION.

Mr. Adkins was, as before stated, constitutionally opposed to wars and to fighting. For this and other more weighty reasons he was a strong Union man from the very earliest agitation of the secession question and felt no hesitation whatever in loudly expressing his sentiments as long as it was safe for him to do so. He strenuously opposed his sons enlisting in the Confederate army and prevented most of them and a great many other persons in his section from shouldering Confederate muskets. However, two of his sons lost their lives in the battles of the Wilderness in 1864.

SINCE THE WAR.

Mr. Adkins has taken but little interest in politics since the war, except in county elections, and these only when a special friend of his happened to be a candidate for some position. In such an emergency he invariably musters his clans, and, as before intimated, his voice at the polls is worth no little in a close contest.

The New York Herald

Whole No 15,167. Saturday, March 2, 1878 Page 4, Cols. 4 - 6

DANVILLE AND VICINITY

[Correspondence of the Richmond Dispatch]

Danville, March 21, 1885

Mr. Owen Adkins, of this county- the head of the numerous Adkins family - now in his ninety-eighth year, is quite feeble, and feeble for the first time in his life.

The Richmond Dispatch

March 22, 1885

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**Owen Adkins Jr. reported to the court of Pittsylvania County that his father, Owen Adkins, son of William & Mary Adkins, died in Pittsylvania County on May 15, 1885 aged 99 years, 6 months.
Pittsylvania County Register of Deaths 1853 -1896, Page 136**

DANVILLE AND VICINITY.

The Farmers of Henry County—The Temperance-Men, &c.

[Correspondence of the Richmond Dispatch.]

DANVILLE, March 21, 1885.

Dr. James Semple, of Henry county, calls for a meeting of the farmers of that county for the 13th of April to take action with reference to the Farmers' Convention, he having been commissioned to act for the State Agricultural Society in that county.

The temperance-men have employed three able lawyers to represent them at the April term of the Hustings Court of this county, and Judge Davis has announced that he will not consider any business at that term except applications for license to sell liquor.

Messrs. Overby and Munford, as commissioners, have sold the lands of James Harris, 130 acres, in this county, for \$800 cash—about \$6.16 per acre.

Mr. Owen Adkins, of this county—the head of the numerous Adkins family—now in his ninety-eighth year, is quite feeble, and feeble for the first time in his life.

Captain W. P. Robinson, as executor of the late William Robinson, is preparing to rebuild the four stores burned during the recent big blaze here.

ALPHA.

The Progenitor of Five Hundred and Fifty Persons.

From the N. Y. Herald.

Pennsylvania county, Va., has for a great number of years enjoyed considerable notoriety as being the native place of some most remarkable characters, but by far the most interestingly remarkable man that or any other country has ever produced in "Old Man Owen Adkins, of Turkey Cock Mountain," whose peculiar moral views, embracing and taking in as they do Mormonism and free love; whose almost incredible physical abilities and remarkable powers of endurance; whose oddities and queer habits, and whose unprecedentedly great number of offspring all combine to make him an object of interest in the limited circle of his acquaintances.

HIS BIRTH AND EARLY LIFE.

Owen Adkins was born on the 26th of December, 1782, and is consequently now in his ninety-sixth year. His parents were very poor and illiterate people of the lower stratum of society, who made a scanty living by hunting and fishing on and around the two beautiful little mountains between which they resided. They had seven children—five boys and two girls—Owen being the third son. Unlettered and ignorant themselves, the parents neither knew nor cared to appreciate the advantages of education, and therefore their children were also raised in blissful ignorance.

Young Owen in early life showed signs of some very decided traits of character, affording evidence of the fact that in point of hard common sense he was not only greatly the superior of his brothers and sisters, but also of his parents. Though small in stature he was the "strongest boy on the mountains" and very fleet of foot, displaying at the same time remarkable powers of endurance and inexhaustible "wind," having the capacity in a long distance over hill and dale to compete in a race with an ordinary horse. His father, noticing these peculiarities, turned them to good account, and always carried young Owen with him to public gatherings and there made him wrestle with larger boys, run foot races, and often compete with slow horses for such wagers as the old man could raise.

In this way the father won much money, taking in at one time the sum of \$50, the amount of a bet on a foot race of five miles against time, the boy making the distance in twenty-six minutes. He was at that time only twelve years of age. The boy, as a matter of course, took great pride in these wonderful powers and successful exploits, and enjoyed the notoriety which they gave him as only a wild mountain boy could.

In the spring of 1805, when Owen was in his twenty-third year, he married and built a house to himself within 100 feet of the house in which he was born, and where he still lives.

His life with his first wife was, for five years or more, a very happy one, and might have continued so to the end but for peculiar ideas on the subject of marriage which, by some means worked themselves into his brain and caused him to publicly proclaim his moral right to have as many wives as he wished.

MORMONISM WITHOUT THE CHURCH.

Now this man never heard of Brigham Young and Mormonism, and long before the Mormon doctrine was proclaimed by Joseph Smith and his followers, Owen Adkins had views and opinions which coincide exactly with the polygamy portion of Joseph Smith's and Brigham Young's creed. He believes that while the laws of the land allow him to have only one wife at a time there is no moral law which prohibits his having as many as he may wish, provided the property supports them and the offspring. In accordance with this then peculiar idea of his he, about five years after his marriage, took unto himself three concubines, for each of whom he built comfortable houses, all within one mile of his own residence.

His first wife did not agree with her husband on the subject of polygamy, and from that time until her death there was no peace in that family. The concubines could agree among themselves, but the wife hated the concubines as only a spirited woman who believes her rights to have been invaded can hate.

The wife died on 1830, after having borne her husband nineteen children, all of whom are living. Within four months after her death the old man married a second time. His second wife had no objection to polygamy and lived in peace and apparent happiness with husband and concubines.

A few years after the second marriage the old man took one more concubine. His second wife only lived a few years, dying in 1839 after bearing five children, four of whom still survive. Mr. Adkins never married after the death of his second wife, but lived with his four concubines until the last one died, about twenty-two years ago, when he took another woman to be a concubine, but has never married her. She still lives with him, and is as kind, obedient and attentive to him as though she were wife instead of concubine.

MORE CHILDREN THAN BRIGHAM YOUNG.

Mr. Adkin's two lawful wives bore him twenty-four children, and his concubines aggregated forty-six, making in all seventy children, sixty-six of whom are now living, only four of this large number of children have died. His oldest child, a son by his first wife, is now seventy-one years old, and lives within a short distance of his father. He also has a very large family, but does not agree with his paternal ancestor in regard to polygamy. The old gentleman's second child a daughter, is nearly seventy years of age. She has been the mother of twelve children, only one of whom has died.

• All of his children that are married and settled, except one, have large families, and it is therefore quite certain that old man Owen Adkin's offspring, including living children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, number somewhere near five hundred and fifty. Nearly all of this tremendous family live right round the old

gentleman within a radius of five miles, and the neighborhood has therefore taken the name of Adkintown, by which it is known throughout that section of the country.

Taken altogether Owen Adkins is the most remarkable man now living. His recollections of early times, his reminiscences of hunting and sporting times, his own narration of his romantic and wild exploits, his original and ready way of telling them, all combine to make him a most interesting person to converse with. While engaged in this long conversation with the Herald representative, there was not a tremor in his voice, he spoke clearly, distinctly and rapidly, and very frequently he would place his hand on my knee as we sat together and I never was able to feel the slightest quiver or tremor in his hand. His every faculty seems to be in full play, and as he is in no way diseased, having never had a physician to attend him in his life, I verily believe his desire to reach a hundred years will be gratified.

MARCH 18, 1878.

A Living Progenitor of 550 Persons.

Owen Adkins, of Pittsylvania county, Va., is the living progenitor of about 550 children. He was married twice, and his lawful wives bore him twenty-four children. Believing that there is no moral law which prohibits him from having as many wives as he could support, he took to himself concubines who bore him forty-six, making in all seventy children, sixty-six of whom are now living, only four out of this large number of children having died. His oldest child, a son by his first wife, is now 71 years old, and lives within a short distance of his father. He also has a very large family, but does not agree with his paternal ancestor in regard to polygamy. The old gentleman's second child (a daughter) is nearly 70 years of age. She has been the mother of twelve children, only one of whom has died. All his children that are married and settled, except one, have large families, and it is therefore quite certain that old man Owen Adkins' offspring, including living children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, number somewhere near 550. Nearly all this tremendous family live right around the old gentleman within a radius of five miles, and the neighborhood has therefore taken the name of Adkintown, by which it is known throughout that section of the country.



