

keg to my mouth, and I drank until it ran down my neck onto my clothes. Then it was his turn. They found us still there on the ground, sick and drunk, about three hours later. I don't remember that we got into any trouble, but I do know that neither of us likes corn whiskey to this day. We may drink it, but we're not crazy about it.

I was eight years old when tragedy came to our close-knit community, striking my own family. Some people had begun stealing cotton, hay, corn, hogs, chickens and other things off our farms. My Uncle James Horton had been missing cotton and found out that his stolen cotton was being bought by his brother-in-law Bassie Rice. He talked to Bassie about this, asking him to repay the cotton or to give him money for it. For weeks they argued but only added to the ill will between them.

Finally, on December 1, 1922 Uncle James ran out of patience and rose early in the morning to confront Bassie Rice. Uncle James came to our house on his way. He called his sister, my mother Clara, out to the porch. When she saw how angry he was, Mother called dad and me out. We were all gathered at the wood pile trying to calm Uncle James. But like that wood destined soon to be consumed in flames, Uncle James could not be turned from his resolve to get his cotton or money from Bassie Rice. Mother cried and begged him not to go. Bassie had threatened Uncle James' life several times, and we could see Uncle James' small pearl handled 32 pistol glinting in the early sunlight from his waist belt. Mother could sense the danger and grabbed hold of Uncle James' arm. But Uncle James began to walk away and finally got his arm loose from her.

We watched him until he got to Bassie Rice's house and shouted for Rice to show himself. When Rice appeared we could see and hear them arguing. An old cultivator stood between the two men silently offering them one last chance for conciliation. But both men whirled out from behind it and fired. We do not know who fired first, but they both fell to the ground.

We flew to Uncle James, his still body lying in a pool of blood. He had been shot through the head and died within three or four minutes. Bassie Rice was shot in the groin and leg, but in his desperation he fled on a horse. We found out later that he had gone into West Huntsville to give himself up to the sheriff.