

The Side[®] Far Side September

1880

The Hatfields and McCoys start feuding after Johnse Hatfield runs off with Rose Anne McCoy without marrying her. Apparently the two clans can't cotton to young love, but have no problem with killing each other for the next 16 years.



Friday 1





Some of the members of the Hatfield clan posed for this photo in 1899, after the famous feud was over.

Granger

The Hatfields and McCoys

*Said to have started with a dispute over some pigs in 1873, the Hatfield-McCoy feud lasted almost 20 years and nearly started a war between Kentucky and West Virginia militias. The following account was dictated by Charles Gillespie, a participant in a Hatfield raid on a McCoy home. Gillespie's story is from **An American Vendetta: A Story of Barbarism in the United States** by Theron C. Crawford, 1889.*

On the first day of last January I was at home, when 'Cap' Hatfield came along and said: 'Charley, we are going over into Kentucky to-night to have some fun. Get a horse and meet us, and go along.' Well, I did not know what was up, but I told 'Cap' I would be on hand, and after a little trouble I got a horse and was at the ren-

dezvous, where I found 'Cap,' 'Johns,' Ellis, 'Bob,' and Ellett Hatfield, 'Old Jim' Vance, Ellison Mounts, and a man who goes by the name of both Mitchell and Chambers, whom I know by the name of the 'Guerrilla.' 'Jim' Vance was in command of the party, and it was agreed at the start, before the real object of the trip

continued

was disclosed, that all should yield to everything he said and do all he might order us to do. . . .

"Arriving at a convenient distance from the McCoy house, I was first made acquainted with the real object of our trip. Vance told us that, if old Randall McCoy and his son 'Cal' were out of the road [dead], every material witness against the men who had taken part in the murder of the three McCoy boys would be removed, and there could be no conviction of any of them, even if they might at some time be arrested for it. All had become tired of dodging the officers of the law, and wished to be able to sleep at home beside better bedfellows than Winchester rifles, and to occasionally take off their boots when they went to bed. . . .

"Well, we determined, if the family would not come out when we should warn them to, to shoot through the windows and doors of the house from the ends and sides, with our Winchesters, volley after volley, until all inside would be either dead or disabled. The only reply the McCoy's made to our demand to come out was to bar and barricade the doors and to prepare to fight us till the last. We shot through the windows and doors and our shooting was responded to by 'Old Ran'l' and 'Cal,' the former with a double-barreled shot-gun and the other with a Winchester. We had to be very careful, as both were good shots.

"I must tell you right here that I was not one of those who were doing the shooting. Me and one of the other Hatfields was put out along the road to act as guards to see that no one came up or that no one got past us. We never went near the house until the house was burning. . . . When they [the men who attacked the house] came up, Ellison Mounts said to me: 'Well, we killed the boy and the girl, and I am sorry of it. We have made a bad job of it. We didn't get the man we wanted at all (meaning "Old Ran'l"). If we had got him, it would have been all right and our work would not have been lost. There will be trouble over this.' I asked him about the fight as we

went along home, and he told me how Chambers had crawled up on the roof to get at those inside and to fire¹ the house, when Ran'l McCoy heard him, and, firing at him through the shingles, shot his hand off behind the knuckles. He said Chambers got down, tied his hurt hand, and, taking his Winchester, began shooting again. It took some time to get the McCoy's out, but finally the door opened and 'Cal' ran out at the top of his speed toward a corn-crib. Several banged away at him, but none of the shots took effect, and one or two more shots were fired, when he was seen to jump up and fall forward. We went to him and found him dead, with a big hole in the back of his head. The girl came out of one of the two dwelling-houses, and wanted to get into the one where the family was, and some of the men told her to go back; but she knew them and named them, and she was killed. . . .

"Mounts told me that he himself made the first move toward getting into the house, breaking into the annex² to the cabin, where he found Alfaro McCoy and the little children. He demanded that the men in there should come out. She told him there were no men about the annex, but Mounts insisted that she make a light.³ She told him to give her a match and she would satisfy him of the truth of her words. Then 'Cap' Hatfield yelled, 'Shoot her,—her, and let's go on.' Then Mounts shot her, and she fell dead without a word. . . .

¹ volley: firing of many weapons at the same time

² to fire: set fire to

³ annex: small building attached to or near the main house

⁴ make a light: light a lamp