

"Matilda's Folly"

excerpt from the book: "From the Banks of the Oklawaha, Vol. II", Chapter 31
1977, by Frank L. FitzSimons

[This book is out of print - available at the Henderson County Public Library]

"There is a beautiful valley in the western part of Henderson County that in years gone by was very isolated and still is to a certain extent. The valley lies between Martha Bell Mountain, in earlier days named for a pioneer woman but in later years called Brushey Mountain, on one side and Jeter Mt. on the other. This valley was settled soon after the American Revolution by the Aikens, Surreys, Snoddy's and Ledfords; families that many years later abandoned the area and left the pretty valley deserted. Only the rotting remains of the cabins are left to give mute evidence that at one time a happy people lived here.

Through this lovely valley flows a large, swift, sparkling stream that takes its name from the area known as the Follies."

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"There are those who say that the name Follies is a corruption of Farley John Orr's first name because he owned so much land in the valley. When he was a young man, friendly Indians still drifted through the valley. They came to get lead from a secret mine somewhere on the mountainside, lead to make bullets for their muskets and to sell to the settlers. The Indians refused to reveal the location of this mine and it was never found by the pioneers. Reckless ones who tried to track the Indians to the mine mysteriously disappeared, never to be seen or heard of again.

Farley John Orr owned an attractive young female slave who was in love with one of the Indians who silently visited the valley and her love was returned by the red man. Matilda would slip quietly out of her cabin in the dead of night to rendezvous at a favorite spot with her lover. Her secret was well kept until the black slave girl gave birth to a baby girl. Matilda must have had a sense of humor because she named her new born Matilda's Folly. Who can say today whether the Follies got its name from a corruption of Farley John Orr's first name or from Matilda's Folly?

Matilda's Folly was an intelligent child and she grew into an intelligent woman. When the war [Civil War] ended she was a free woman, but she stayed on in this valley where she was born and she was taught by her African mother and her Indian father. She grew into a strong woman with a quick, retentive mind. From her Cherokee Indian father she learned to know the wild herbs and the roots and barks; the wild flowers that were good to use. She learned from her mother how to brew these things into medicines, soothing ointments and salves and lotions; all of these things to treat the sick and to ease the pain and suffering of the afflicted."

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"She lived to the age of 97 years and remained active up to the time of her death. Her passing was grieved by all. Matilda's Folly was buried, as she requested, in the yard of her red, mud-daubed cabin under a large white oak tree. Before she died she had a marker made for the head of her grave. It was a slab of gray granite that was chiseled from the side of Jeter Mountain. The top of the marker was cut with four slanting teeth. She gave no explanation as to why her grave marker was so shaped. When her grave was filled and the tombstone had been placed, it was whispered through the gathering of her friends that the stone with the slanting teeth had a religious significance; a symbol handed down to her by either her African or Indian ancestors."