

# Wilder Merriment

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John T. Wilder's brother and sister and their families would often come to stay at his home in Roan Mountain. Eventually they built summer homes next to Wilder's house. The entire clan made "merriment," or practical jokes an integral part of these visits.

Horace Wilder, John's brother, was a huge man, 6'4" tall and 250 pounds. Neither was John a small man at 6'2" and 220 pounds.

During one of Horace's visits the "Genr'l" convinced his brother that the village was haunted. The apparition, according to John, was some poor fellow named Elisha, who had died from a fall from the roof of John's home during construction.

Horace, being of a considerably more serious mien, was contemplating this news after supper and while preparing for bed. About midnight, Horace's wife awoke, shook him, and fearfully related that she had heard human moans outside the bedroom window and had seen something white pass by the window in the dark.

Horace got up, threw open the window, which was above a porch roof, stuck his head out and was immediately hit with a screaming white sheet under control of his brother John. Horace jerked back, cracking his noggin' on the window sash, and fell back into the room with a loud curse, scaring the stump water out of his wife.

Adding injury to insult, Horace had painfully wedged his bare foot in the half-full chamber pot. He proceeded to clomp around the room in the dark, trumpeting like a wounded bull elephant. He finally released his foot with a crash of china by kicking the door.

Pandemonium reigned as candles were lit and other members of the household came running to see what all the commotion was about. Had it not been for brother John making noise and laughing while descending the ladder from the roof, he might never have been found out.

As it was Brevet Brigadier General John T. Wilder, “leader of the Lightning Brigade, savior of the Union at Chickamauga,” had to leave the village for three days for fear of his life. Horace had threatened to kill him with his bare hands if he caught him. Cooler heads prevailed and John was allowed to safely enter his own home after that time, but the story could never be told in the presence of Horace or his wife.

Around the turn-of-the-century, a family gathering was held at the Stratton home in Hampton. Martha Wilder, who was sweet and meek, was being importuned to take a canoe ride (against her will) with her brother-in-law, Arthur Scott, on the large spring next to the house. The whole family, “Papa” included, was issuing orders and instructions on how not to get stranded with one foot on the dock and one in the canoe.

“Mattie,” as she was known, being an unsure and timid person, proceeded to do exactly that. With one foot on the dock and one in the canoe, she began to slowly do the splits amidst a rising crescendo of instructions and warnings. Arthur was unable to hold the canoe close to the dock and, finally, she reached the point of no return. She fell, ungracefully, faced down in the spring. The family now compounded the indignity by laughing at her and telling her “I told you so.”