

## **The Red Petticoat** **An Incident of Schellsburg Life**

### **Sixty Years Ago — A Striking Illustration of the Truth That Men Are But Children of a Larger Growth.**

What Queer things partisan politics has made men do! Sixty years have rolled away since the occurrence I am about to narrate and all the actors in the drama sleep peacefully beneath the graveyard sod but one who close on the verge of four score years recalls with vivid memory the incidents of that day which saw him just entering upon life's young manhood with all its hopeful prospects stretching enticingly before him. It was the year 1836, and General William Henry Harrison was the candidate of the Whigs for president. He was traveling west through Bedford, and David Patterson and Samuel Vondersmith and David Washabaugh and Daniel Crouse and many others of the Bedford Whigs, escorted him on his journey to the western limit of the county.

There are few country villages more beautifully located than Schellsburg, a rival to Goldsmith's "Sweet Auburn loveliest village of the plain." It is a dull place now. Its glory has departed. But then it was a bustling, busy center of country trade. Four or five taverns and as many stores and two blacksmiths and a wagonmaker and a cabinetmaker, a tinner, a tailor, a hatter, two shoemakers and a tannery, two doctors, and two daily stage coaches transporting passengers to and from Pittsburgh and the west, and long lines of wagons with English beds and canvas covers, and passing droves of innumerable cattle and horses and mules and hogs and sheep, seeking an eastern market, made it a lively place, and its inhabitants were proud of their home. They were mostly Democrats boastfully proud of their democracy, with the assured conviction that General Jackson needed only canonization to become a saint — "d\_\_\_d low bred Locofocos" the Whigs called them.

The Locos called Harrison "Granny Harrison," and they had some story of a petticoat, the coinage doubtless of pure malice, and so to put ignominy on the Whigs and their candidate with an audacity of insolence that is refreshing to hear about — a striking illustration of the truth that men are but children of a larger growth, they erected in Schellsburg on the edge of the turnpike at the corner where Doctor Ealy's house was afterwards placed, a pole, and suspended on it, to an arm which overhung the very spot that Harrison and his escort would pass over, a large red petticoat, which was made by the wife of the village blacksmith, Bob Fry.

When the Whigs passed under and realized the situation they boiled over with indignation, and as they returned from the western limit of the county to which they had escorted the old general, they formed a procession two-a-breast with the avowed purpose of cutting down the pole. Jim Mullin, carrying an axe, and old Dan Crouse headed the procession, and the rest came on behind in a long double file, and down the turnpike they marched, a formidable array, but the Locos rallied around the pole armed with stones, a pile of which was close at hand, and stood a clustered rank with no sign of dismay or symptom of retreat — Jack Lindsey, the tall, gaunt hatter, at their head, and the ensanguined petticoat flaunting in the wind.

As the head of the Whig procession got within a rod or two, Lindsey made a brilliant *coup-de-main*. With a leap and a rush he snatched the axe from Mullin, and swinging it around his head swore he would brain the first man who touched that pole. Old Mr. Mengle waddled his two hundred and fifty pounds up the center of the pike from his tavern, crying, "Don't let them cut it down, boys! Don't let them cut it down!"

At this distance it must be confessed it looks as if the Whigs were somewhat lacking. They did not deploy in line of battle and doubtless their steps were somewhat slack as they neared the point of action and found the Democrats firm. Discretion proved the better part of valor. The Whigs had no other axe at hand. The un-terrified Democracy were bent on fight. Jack Lindsey would have brained some one. He was manifestly in earnest. To cut down the pole meant bloodshed, sure, and so with bluster and deep damnation of the Democrats they withdrew, and the petticoat held its exasperating place to the end of the campaign.

One incident Mr. Reed describes. Among the Locos was Bob Lawler, a stage driver. Bob stood in the crowd with a stone in each hand. Vondersmith was the manager of the stage line. As he approached, Bob put his hands behind, rather out of sight, and as Vondersmith sharply demanded "Bob what are you doing here?" He dropped the stones and replied, "Oh! I am only looking on."

William M. Hall

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