

A BEAR STORY – A BEAR ENCOUNTER – HUNTING GAME

In 1805, three neighbors, residing on Two Lick, not far from the “Manor tract,” started on a deer hunt, and one of the dogs discovered and attacked a bear. The outcry of the dog brought the hunters to the rescue. One of them advanced and made a pass at the bear with his axe, when bruin, with a dexterous movement with his paw, knocked the axe from his hands, dropped the dog, and with his strong jaws laid hold of the hunter’s leg just above the ankle. Then came the “tug of war;” and the result was, for some time, doubtful. His comrades durst not shoot, as the position of the contestants was constantly changing; the bear still holding on to the leg with a grip of iron, and his friends undecided what to do. Evidently, they did not wish to hazard too much in the probability of becoming the chief party in the struggle for life with this shaggy and fearful monster. The dogs barked but durst not attack the bear. However, the hunters did what they could, looking well to every dangerous position. The brave man, notwithstanding his ankle in a *vice*, soon gained the battle, by the aid of his jack-knife, cutting the bear’s throat; but it was months before he was able to leave his house.

Among the materials of our early history is the following account of a bear encounter:

“In 1822 a hunter, returning through the woods to Indiana, treed a bear with three cubs, a few miles north of the village. He came to the place and rallied several men with guns to go and kill the bears. On arriving at the spot, two of the cubs were spied high up in a pine tree; and one of the hunters, a good marksman with a rifle, soon shot them both. The other cub and the older bear not being discovered, most of the party started for the village. A few remained to watch for the missing bears. They soon heard the cub in the top of a small hemlock, the limbs of which were so dense as to conceal the animal. Determined to capture it, one of them climbed the tree and shook the cub from one of the highest limbs, but in its fall it caught another limb. From this, too, it was shaken, and again caught a limb lower down. This being too stiff to admit the cub’s being shaken off, he cut the limb partly off with his jack knife, when it lopped down and the bear fell to the ground, and was so stunned by the fall that one of the parties caught it and tied its feet. When the cub made a noise the older bear was heard near by in the bushes. The man who held the cub found by biting its ear he could make it squeal. This brought the old bear near by, but not fully in sight. The marksman who killed the other cubs, stepped off a few rods into the woods, and, while watching the cub, Bruin again was rallied by the biting of the cub’s ear, and was brought in sight of the hunter who sent a rifle ball into her head and neck. After taking out the entrails, she was brought into the village, while one of the party carried the cub to his home and subsequently tamed it.

Of the numerous instances of men’s coming in contact with bears, wolves, and other ravenous beasts, it is believed there is not one in which a man was killed. Nearly all of the native animals of the forest have disappeared, and the wild and venturesome sports of the past seem like a dream to the present generation.

While the forest was infested with noxious animals, it was of no small value as a hunting ground. Deer hunting in the winter was a common business. Much of the meat was sometimes lost. The hunter, if alone and far from home, would shoulder the more valuable part – hams and skin – and leave the rest for the wolves; or he would hang it to a sapling of a large limb of a tree, which had been bent down for the purpose, and which, springing back, would raise the meat beyond the reach of the wolves. Having delivered his first load at the cabin, he would return, conducted by his tracks in the snow, and bring home the remainder. The opossum, raccoon, the rabbit and the squirrel were also a part of the pioneer’s fare. To the variety of meats enumerated, may be added several of the feathered tribes, as pigeon, ducks, wild turkeys, partridges and several others. The forks of the Mahoning was in early days, the favorite roosting place of thousands of wild turkeys, and other birds. As such it was well known to the Senecas.

In a brief period game as a steady diet made way for pork and poultry. Beef was only occasionally used, cattle were too valuable to use for food. The common fowl furnished meat and eggs, geese were chiefly raised for the feathers, with which old beds were replenished, and new ones filled. Many still repose on beds made by their mothers or grandmothers half a century ago.