

The Lantern

I can't help but look up every time I pass it now. I was on my way to a practice at Lodge when I saw it again this evening.

The old store at Rocky Creek is closed now — has been for a number of years. I remember walking the creek on my way back from squirrel hunting at the Foster farm and turning up the bank at the willows to go up to the store. It was always warm inside, and I would get a bologna and cheese sandwich and a coke. These were no ordinary sandwiches, but thick portions of hoop cheese and bologna cut right off the roll and plopped on a piece of Aunt Sally's white bread.

There was always someone telling a story there, and it was a treat for me to sit on a drink crate, eat my sandwich, and listen. Bill Keller and Ted Bare were some of the best storytellers around — they could stretch the truth as well as anyone. One December morning they were in rare form.

"I was up at Possum Rock," said Bill, "when I hooked the biggest catfish I ever did see. I fit him for almost an hour, and when I got him near the boat, I saw that the hook was barely holding. I knew I couldn't lift him into the boat, and he was too big for the net. So I just jumped in the water and grabbed ahold of him. I rode him around the boat four or five times till he tired out, then I rassed him into the boat — he weighed 123 pounds!"

Not to be outdone, Ted started his story. "I was up at the rail track above the brickyard when I hooked ahold of something heavy," said Ted. "I reeled and reeled, and when I pulled it up to the boat, all I could see was a lump of grass. I examined it and began to pull away the weeds until I saw it was an old railroad lantern — it must have fallen off a train some time ago. The darndest thing about it was that the lantern was still burning!"

Well, all of us were just getting over what Bill had told about riding that big fish around the boat — when Ted told us the lantern story, the whole place got quiet — no one said a thing.

Then Bill spoke up — "Ted", said Bill, "I'll take a 100 pounds off that fish if you'll turn out the light on that lantern!"

I'm glad we're practicing tonight. My Lodge, Acacia 357, has a tradition of always practicing before a degree.

My old coach Red used to say "You always practice — if you don't practice before the degree, you'll practice during it."

It is important. The candidate deserves our best, and no matter who we are, past master, lodge officer, certified lecturer, or grand master — if we don't practice before the degree, we practice during it. Old Red was right.