

Hatfield-McCoy Feud Timeline

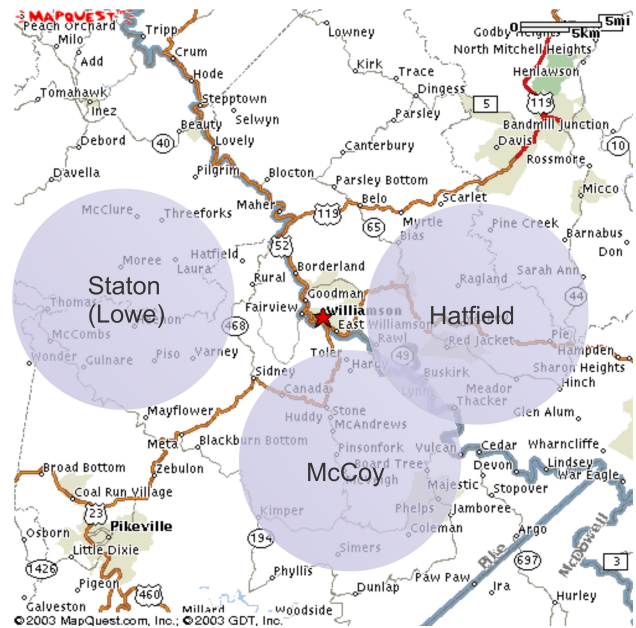
The Hatfield-McCoy affair was not the first feud in the southern mountains, nor the last, nor the longest, nor the bloodiest: It was simply the best publicized. It did not involve all the Hatfields against all the McCoys, but only one man (William Anderson “Devil Anse” Hatfield) against another (Randall “Ole Ran'l” McCoy) with their immediate families and close friends. For most of the 30 years of the feud, they lived in relative peace but with a feeling of rancor.

For example another William Anderson Hatfield (called Preacher Anse) lived near Randall McCoy without any conflict.

Pre 1863

From the 1850s, timber becomes a major source of wealth in the region. William Anderson Hatfield and Randall McCoy are major competitors. Their ethics are lacking by modern standards. McCoy accuses Hatfield of stealing several timber tracts from him. In general, Hatfield is more aggressive and more successful. Both should probably be considered as “hillbilly robber barons.”

Their principal area of contention was around Matewan, WV, which would see a bloody labor battle in 1920.



1863

Devil Anse Hatfield forms guerrilla band. Raids and thefts follow between McCoys and Hatfields.

The guerrilla band never participates in the Civil War. Mostly it is simply harassment of suspected Northern sympathizers.

West Virginia statehood.

1865

First death in feud -- Asa Harmon McCoy. No prosecution.

Asa Harmon McCoy joins the Union Army; practically everyone else supports the South. When the wounded McCoy returns home to recover, some members of the Hatfield guerrillas threaten him. He is killed while hiding in a cave. Most people consider that he receives a just reward for betraying the South.

Civil War ends in May.

1878

Randall McCoy accuses Floyd Hatfield of stealing his pig. Bill Staton's testimony in court later wins for Floyd Hatfield.

During the 13 year gap there is no feud. Devil Anse and Randall are never friends but tolerate each other.

Pigs run practically wild; each owner notches his pig's ears in a distinctive pattern to identify them. This pig has a torn ear which destroys the marking.

Almost every one assumes that Bill Staton is bribed by the Hatfields. He is related to the McCoy's. After the trial, he moves to West Virginia to avoid revenge from the McCoy's.

Bill Station was first cousin to my great grandmother. All families have skeletons in the closet. Bill Station was far from the worst.

1880

Bill Staton killed by Paris and Sam McCoy in June. Sam McCoy tried in September for Staton death; acquitted.

The trial is a farce. Devil Anse's brother is the judge. Apparently Devil Anse does not consider Bill Staton worthy of vengeance.

Roseanna McCoy and Johnse Hatfield meet. She leaves to live with him at a Hatfield cabin.

The initial meeting of Roseanna and Johnse is hardly the romantic ideal. Within minutes after meeting they leave for privacy and spend the night together. Johnse is 17; Roseanna is described as "older." Whether this means 18 or 30 cannot be determined. I would guess she was 20-22. She obviously is looking for a husband and probably seduces Johnse.

Devil Anse refuses permission for them to marry. Why is speculative. Probably not the feud since it does not really exist at that time. He permits Johnse to marry Roseanna's cousin Nancy the next year. One possibility is that Roseanna is known to be sexual active before meeting Johnse. This would be more than adequate grounds for refusing permission to marry. The mores of the time does not permit recognition of the fact even

though most people are aware of rumors.

1881

Roseanna returns home, then moves to aunt's cabin where Johnse is captured by McCoy boys. Roseanna's ride to Devil Anse saves Johnse.

Johnse's action forces recognition that Roseanna is behaving immorally by the standards of the time. Therefore, revenge is necessary; probably a beating not a killing. Possibly a forced marriage without permission of his father which would divide the Hatfield clan.

Pregnant, Roseanna returns to Ole Ran'l's home, catches measles, miscarries baby, then moves to Pikeville. Johnse marries Nancy McCoy on May 14.

Roseanna catches measles or some other disease. Some sources indicate the the baby is born and dies a few weeks later but most indicate miscarriage. Gonorrhoea or syphilis are other possible diseases that would account for the facts; All were common. Roseanna would die a few years later.

1882

Ellison Hatfield fatally wounded by Bud, Tolbert and Pharmer McCoy on August 9. After Hatfield dies, the trio is tied to bushes and executed.

Ellison is drunk and looking for a fight; if not the McCoy's then someone else. The youngest of the McCoy's is only 16. The boys are taken to Kentucky and killed there. This would avoid prosecution in West Virginia.

Jeff McCoy killed on banks of the Tug River.

The Tug River separates Kentucky and West Virginia. The Hatfields are very careful to not kill anyone in West Virginia.

An arrest warrant is issued in Kentucky for the Hatfields but nothing happens. The feud dies for the next 5 years.

1887

Kentucky governor appoints Frank Phillips to capture McCoy boys' murderers.

Enter Perry Cline and the final phase of the feud starts. By 1885 Cline is effectively the political boss of Pike County with a desire for vengeance against Devil Anse. Orphaned in his teens, he loses a lucrative timber deal to Devil Anse before he is twenty. He accuses Devil Anse of cheating; probably true but normal for that time. In 1886 he is ready to exact his vengeance. His influence helps elect the new governor, who rewards Cline by reinstating the Hatfield arrest warrants.

Deputy Sheriff Frank Phillips is appointed to capture the Hatfields. At the instigation of Cline, he resigns and organizes a group of bounty hunters. Reason: As deputy sheriff if he raids in West Virginia and brings the captives to Kentucky, they would be released and given safe passage back to West Virginia. But as a bounty hunter he could raid in West Virginia and give the captives to the Sheriff in Kentucky. Since the Sheriff is never in West Virginia the arrests would be legal. Cline finances the bounty hunters and raids begin. The governor of West Virginia considers activating the National Guard to suppress the raids.

About this time, Cline commissions T.C. Crawford to write the story of the feud – as related by Perry Cline.

1888

New Year's Day raid on Randall McCoy's cabin leaves Alifair and Calvin dead, home burned to ground. Roseanna McCoy dies in Pikeville.

The Hatfields raid the McCoy cabin presumably on the assumption that if the McCoy's are dead, the raids would stop. They do not realize that Cline is behind the raids. The killing of a woman turns almost everyone against them.

Bounty hunters capture, Johnse and several other Hatfields.

Devil Anse is never arrested or even accused of any violent crime. Devil Anse contests the legality of the arrests to the Supreme Court. The court rules that the bounty hunters are legal. A bad precedent for the American legal system.

1889

Trial of Hatfield clan in McCoy murders begins.

Devil Anse owns thousands of acres of timber land. In itself, this makes him very wealthy. Only hints of the potential wealth of the coal and oil under his land are becoming apparent. With his abilities to acquire and manage his property, Devil Anse could become the wealthiest person in the Southern Appalachian mountains.

The trial is very expensive for Devil Anse. He has to sell a major part of his land. All Hatfields are convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment except Ellison Mounts who is sentenced to death. Johnse's sentence is later commuted when he saves a prison guard during a riot.

T.C. Crawford publishes "An American Vendetta."

1890

Ellison Mounts executed for Alifair McCoy's murder. (Feb 18).

Ellison Mounts is the illegitimate son of Devil Anse's brother. He is mentally incompetent with an intelligence of an 8 year old.

1891

Feud ends.

Randall McCoy and family move to Pikeville. Devil Anse Hatfield and family relocate to near Logan, West Virginia. Then the feud ends possibly because they are no longer competing in the same area.

In 1885, William Anderson Hatfield was one of the richest men in southern West Virginia and eastern Kentucky. By 1891, he has lost most of his fortune. But even with his losses he fares better than Randall McCoy who is practically destitute for the rest of his life.