

Genealogy's Great-Grandfathers

A Jackson Sellers email to friends interested in genealogy, February 2006:

Horse thieves, scandals and even killers are marvelous discoveries in genealogy research, and they should be cherished. Without them, our ancestry would be pretty dry, devoid of the stuff of life. Consider this 1909 postcard that shows my great-grandfather chasing away Harry, my grandmother Jennye's rascal heartthrob. My great-granddad's ire came too late. Jennye was already pregnant after fooling around with handsome Harry Sutton on the banks of Kentucky's Green River near the hamlet of Wrightsburg.



Years ago I wrote about this postcard in a book for my daughter, still alive then:

In early 1909, when Jennye's unwedlocked pregnancy became family knowledge, a wrath-filled Wesley "Doc" Sellers went after young Harry with a shotgun, or so Harry was told, so he believed, and Harry, no fool, took off for parts unknown, fleeing for his life, leaving Jennye to face the music alone. In mid-spring of that year, well into her pregnancy at the family farmhouse, Jenny received a postcard from Aunt Stella in nearby Wrightsburg. Stella, only three years older than Jennye, was more of a girlfriend than an aunt, and Jennye, plump with child, had stayed with her for a while, only recently coming home to Beech Grove. Stella's postcard was one of those cartoon cards that were so popular in turn-of-the-century America. This one showed an angry father wielding a bullwhip against a suitor of his young daughter. The publisher's caption, only barely literate, was "Loves Labour Lost." Stella had put labels on the characters in this cartoon drama. "Mr. Sellers" was lashing out at "Harry" while a distressed "Jennye" watched from an upstairs window. "Your Sebree beau was over last night," Stella teased. "See what you missed by going home? I guess you will come back now."



Jennye Sellers

Harry Sutton did come back, staying well out of Mr. Sellers's range, and he begged Jennye to marry him. But Jennye's feelings were hurt. She refused, although it has been said that she loved him until the day she died. My father, Claudius Raymond Sellers, was born in July of 1909, and he grew up on what's now called the Old Sellers Place outside Beech Grove, population 150 then and now. Everybody knew this Sellers boy, a good basketball player, was really a Sutton from the more prominent family across the river. If my great-grandfather had not interfered, I could have been Jackson Sutton, but I don't think the name has the same ring as the one I wound up with, the one I got from Jennye, my dear grandmother, who as a young woman looked extraordinarily like my lost daughter.