

## “Root Buying Day”

By Lex Shuler

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When I drive past the three big oak trees that stand where Grandpa’s house used to be, it reminds me of good times, stories, and hunting tales that were an integral part of that old homestead. Root buying day at Grandpa’s place was but one that comes to mind. About 4 times a year, Mr. McGee from Eola, MO came to buy roots and fur. The 2 visits for root buying day were close to the first of July and then again in early November. Everyone who dug roots and gathered herbs brought their stuff to Grandpa’s. He would let everyone know when McGee would be there and they would haul their roots and herbs by the gunny sack full to sell.

It was also a social time when everyone would exchange hunting stories and tales of large patches of black root they had found and large stalks of gensing harvested. When McGee got there the business began. Grandpa had a large scale that he would hang on a limb of a big oak in his front yard and they used his scale as the official weight. He used this same scale to weigh honey, grain, and vegetables he had for sale. One by one each person who had roots and herbs for sale weighed in and McGee would tally each one and then write a check out of his big checkbook. Grandpa always waited until last to have his bounty weighed.

Some of the summer roots and herbs were May Apple, Black Root, Snake Root, Blood Root and Golden Seal all bringing from a few cents to three or four dollars a pound. Grandpa always gathered Scull Cap herb and the tops from the Golden Seal. Some times he would gather the back of the Wahoo shrub and Sassafras bark. All of the items were in burlap sacks and were weighed sack and all. There would always be a variety of items collected and sold and they all eventually went to medicinal manufacturers and patent medicine companies for their curative powers.

All of the activity usually lasted for most of the day, no one was in any big hurry. Those who got the largest check usually did some bragging and there were challenges laid for the next root buying day. Grandpa most always had the largest check, it was a given, amongst the others. I don’t think anyone ever out did him even though they tried. I was at one of the root days when the total of all the checks amounted to right at \$8000, not a small sum for those days. The money would go for special needs, into savings or to purchase a few new traps for trapping season. Everyone would leave late in the afternoon in time to get home for supper. I think the visiting and fellowship was the main reason behind root buying days because they lingered well after the weighing was done and the checks were written, even Mr. McGee.