The Trickster Tricker

By Haydn Fox

It was shortly before 1920. The custom of "trick or treat" at Halloween had not yet come into being. It was purely "trick" back then. In the area of Fern, Mich., about eight miles south of Custer, farming was the main—and perhaps the only—industry. Farm boys loved to play pranks on their neighbors.

But one year their antics were somewhat destructive to one neighbor's property. The angry farmer stormed that if anyone played tricks on him again, he was going to shoot them!

Such a threat was a challenge to my mother's three brothers, Glenn, Byrl and Cleal Huddlestun. When Halloween drew near, they schemed with a friend to dismantle a small horse-drawn wagon, get it on the roof of a shed, and reassemble it. This prank was often pulled in the Good Old Days.

Halloween came, and they were ready to make their move. All four had been gleefully looking forward to the evening of their stunt. But alas, when the day arrived, Cleal, the youngest, became very ill. He was too sick to get out of bed, and he lay there for most of the day.

As it grew dark and the time drew near for the boys to strike, the three went to Cleal's bed and let him know that they would miss him terribly as they worked. Cleal thanked them for their concern and encouraged them to proceed with the plans.

Then, shortly after his companions left, Cleal jumped out of bed, quickly dressed, and took a double-barrel shotgun from the gun closet. He then stealthily made his way toward the boys' destination, taking care to stay out of sight.

He found a hiding place in some nearby bushes and waited. Soon the three had taken one wheel off the wagon and had started on the second. At that point, Cleal raised the gun and fired both barrels into the air. The three boys panicked and ran away, terrified. As they fled, Cleal quickly left his hiding place and hurried home ahead of them. He put the gun in its place, donned his nightclothes, and hopped back into bed.

As soon as the other three arrived, they went upstairs to tell Cleal what had happened. Their clothes were torn and spotted with blood; in their haste, they had forgotten the barbed-wire fence that stretched a short distance from their victim's shed.

Because of the success of his personal mission, Cleal had something of a battle to keep from laughing. It was some time, perhaps years, before Cleal told them what he had done. Then they laughed, too. ❖

FROM ***GOOD OLD DAYS*** MAGAZINE, OCTOBER 2005, VOL. 42, NO. 10, COPYRIGHT © 2005 ***GOOD OLD DAYS*** MAGAZINE