



Text Version of Audio Story: Feud

It was August, 1882. Three of the McCoys had been captured by members of the Hatfield clan. They were tied to pawpaw trees there in the Tug Valley. It was one of the most remote and backward places of its time.

One by one, the Hatfields executed them. When they got to the youngest of the McCoys, a boy only fifteen years old, the Hatfields told him, "Go ahead kid, beg for your life." He replied, "Go to hell." They murdered him in cold blood. The Hatfields were avenging the death of one of their family members, who likewise had been murdered in cold blood by members of the McCoy clan.

No one is really sure how the most notorious feud in American history started. Some say it was over a stolen pig. Others say it was over timber. Love certainly played a role in it, as the Hatfields and McCoys were intermarried.

The Hatfields and McCoys lived in the area of the Tug Fork River, a part of the Big Sandy River. The Tug Fork separated West Virginia and Kentucky. Hatfields and McCoys lived on either side. During the Civil War, West Virginia and Kentucky were border states between north and south. Men from these states often differed on alliances. Some fought for the Union, others for the Confederacy. Hatfields and McCoys started killing one another during the Civil War.

And in the years that would follow the end of that war, the least little rift among the two families had the ability to set off a firestorm of bad feelings. More often than not, the smallest of disagreements would become a blood bath. Like I said, no one is certain how it started. One thing historians unanimously agree on, however, is that the division of America in the Civil War and the animosities between north and south was a recipe for disaster among the Hatfields and McCoys.

Historians not only disagree on how it started, but on how many people died. It is said to be an untold countless number. They also disagree on how long the feud lasted. By some accounts it went on as late as the 1890s. It was then a court found a number of Hatfields guilty of crimes against the McCoys. Some went to prison for life. One was actually hanged for killing a young woman.

For years the quarreling had ceased, but in April of 2003, the Hatfield and McCoys were at it again – this time before a judge in a civil case. The McCoys were asking for the right to visit a cemetery where several of their slain ancestors were laid to rest. The cemetery is on Hatfield ground. The judge said the McCoys have every right to visit the graves of their kin. Both sides claimed victory in the suit, and the Hatfields said the only thing they wanted was to be sure the graveyard wasn't turned into a tourist attraction.

In June of that same year, 2003, a few Hatfields got together with a few McCoys and said, once and for all let's put an end to the legendary feud of the Tug Valley. Let's, once and for all, show America and the world that if the Hatfields and McCoys can put aside their differences and live in peace, anyone can.

The governors of Kentucky and West Virginia have declared June 14th as a holiday of sorts – the day the Hatfields and McCoys made peace. They signed a formal truce. Everyone is keeping their fingers crossed.

The Hatfields and McCoys are now holding joint family reunions, and at the last gathering, some three thousand descendants of both families got together for a barbecue. On that same stretch of blood-soaked geography where for years they despised and killed one another, they now sit down and visit and talk and laugh and break bread together.

From somewhere behind the radio, with the music of Johnny X, I'm the American Storyteller.