

## A Strange Family Heirloom: the Rib of a Scottish King in America?

It has been a common practice within many families, to pass down *heirlooms* through the generations. Generally, these venerated ancestral artifacts are normally items of jewelry, furniture, paintings, silverware, china, etc. However, such is not always the case.

For many years, the descendants of the late 18th-century Kentucky frontiersman **Michael Cassidy**, an early Fleming County pioneer from Ireland, bequeathed through successive generations, the *skin of an Indian*, which as late as 1888, hung upon one side of the family barn. As the family tradition goes, Cassidy came back to the fort from a day's hunt, only to have his wife emphatically declare: "While you were gone, an Indian stole our cow outside the fort, *I want his hide!*" Taking his spouse at her word, Cassidy is said to have hunted the man down, killed him and skinned his hide, after bringing it home to his wife. The *skinning* of one another, by both White settlers and Native Americans is a well-attested fact in American history, as happened for example to the famed Shawnee Indian chieftain, Tecumseh.

Perhaps one of the strangest heirlooms, is that left by Dr. **Robert Bruce Honeyman**, a resident of Hanover County, Virginia at the time of his death in April of 1824. Honeyman was an accomplished 'Doctor of Physic,' who had immigrated from Scotland to America in 1774. A native of Kincardine, he was educated at Marischal College in Aberdeen, later served as a surgeon within the British Navy, but after settling in Louisa, Virginia, became a physician for the Revolutionary Army of the United States.

Though Dr. Honeyman passed away on April 21st, 1824, he had previously written out his will in 1821, and upon his death, newspapers across the country printed a strange excerpt of his will, a document found in the 'Chancery Papers' in Hanover County, Virginia. The appropriate portion states:

"I also give and bequeath to my son, a *human rib*, which will Be found in a small trunk in my chest, with my earnest request that he will carefully keep *the said rib*, (*which is of James the Fifth, King of Scotland*),and transmit it carefully to his descendants."

**King James V** (1512-1542), the 'red-haired king' of Scotland, died at the young age of thirty, at Falkland Palace in County Fife, a county where many of the Honeyman family members had resided as well.

His father, King James IV, had been killed at the famed battle between the English & Scottish forces at 'Flodden Field,' fought in 1513. Though not a participant in the battle, King James the Fifth died only a short time after a Scottish defeat in 1542, and was buried at Holyrood Abbey in Edinburgh, where purportedly his remains exist today.

It is true that a number of *Honeyman* family members, served in important positions within the Church and had close ties with the Crown for many years. Yet how exactly, *a rib of the king* came into the possession of Dr. Robert B. Honeyman remains a mystery. Family records do exist that speak of it eventually being broken into sections so as to be divided by his heirs, and eventually disappeared altogether.

Regrettably, no known portions of the rib exist today, otherwise DNA studies could be carried out on the remains. Still, one would think that today, it would at least be possible to exhume the body of King James the Fifth at Holyrood, just to see if the famed ruler of Scotland is indeed, *missing a rib*. If so, the mystery still tantalizes the imagination as to how members of the Honeyman family (or perhaps Dr. Honeyman himself), were enabled to obtain the regal body part? Perhaps a reader can shed more light upon the subject. I simply share the above account as a witness once again, to the varied and diverse collections, both topically and geographically, which are available here at The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

(If interested in the above, one might wish to consult the following: **Poulson's American Daily Advertiser**, May 12, 1824; **The Susquehannah (PA) Democrat**, May 28, 1824; A. Van Doren Honeyman, **The Honeyman Family in Scotland & America** (Plainfield, NJ: Honeyman's Publishing House., 1909); **Tyler's Quarterly Historical & Genealogical Magazine**, Vol.IX, No.4 (April, 1928): 284; Vol.X, (1929): 172.)

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