

Panther: It's what's for dinner

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The following account is taken from History of Clarendon by David Sturges Copeland, published in 1889.

This gives us a feeling for travel and accommodations people experienced along the way during our developmental years of the early 19th century.

"Benjamin Copeland, who died in Clarendon at the age of 87, was once a member of the Legislature of Michigan, and also a merchant at Webster's Mills in Kendall and at one time a partner with David Sturges in this store.

"He was the most perfect conversationalist that Clarendon has known, a graduate in 1814, of Brown University, Providence, R.I.,



and a private tutor at Natchez, Miss., where the great ornithologist, Audubon, formed his acquaintance, and retouched his own portrait, which is at present in his widow's possession at Washington.

"Uncle Benjamin, as we loved to call him, was a very good storyteller, and we were always ready to listen when he began his tales.

"Once upon a time, when returning from the sunny South, in company with gentlemen, riding through the wilderness to Washington and other

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points north, he was made the steward as to eatables and drinkables. It was his habit to push ahead on his steed and inform the log landlords that meals must be prepared for his friends in the rear.

"Ridging up to a log inn, about eleven A.M. he informed mine host that he must prepare to feed at dinner a number of guests who were very hungry, having passed many a weary mile since breakfast. 'Nut I am all eat out,' said the landlord. 'You must provide something,' replied Copeland. 'I have nothing in the house but a dead panther,' came from the host's lips. 'Well then, cook this up, and I will take a crust of bread, as my stomach is too delicate to digest panther!'

"By the time the party had arrived the panther was on the spit over the fireplace in the kitchen and Uncle Benjamin escorted the anxious travelers into a rude sitting room. They could snuff the fine flavor of the broiling meat and from the very depths of their stomachs wished to know what delicious flesh he was preparing for their dinner.

"'O, wait and see!' was the happy reply; and in due time these voracious guests sat down to dine, and filled their hunger-casks with heavy supplies of what they considered to be roast pork of the finest quality.

"The steward excused himself from eating, pleading a headache, which was very natural.

"After promising to tell his friends of what they had so royally partaken, he waited until the panther had lost itself in the system and then, with a sly twinkle from his black eyes, murmured 'Panther!'

"About one dozen mouths vainly attempted to heave from below all that they had eaten, but Dame Nature had been too speedy in her labors, and they went their way, realizing one fact, that the mind very often considers ignorance as bliss."