

WHY DID DR. JOHN WENTZ BELIEVE THAT CALVIN PARDEE HAD KILLED HIS SON, EDWARD (TED) WENTZ?

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Big Stone Gap, Virginia 24219
March 2023

On October 14, 1903 Ted Wentz went for a horseback ride after having uncharacteristically left his attack dog locked in his home on Poplar Hill in Big Stone Gap, Va. He and his brother, Dan, had been sent by their father, Dr. John Wentz, to manage the family's coal holdings in Virginia. Ted left his horse whip, with which he frequently struck people, at home also. He took his 32 caliber hammerless pocket revolver, in which he had loaded only three shells, and his Morgan horse after telling others that he was going to visit Charles Wax at his home on Guest's River. He was last seen at Kellyview. Late that evening his horse, with its reins broken, was found alone at Kent Junction. The road to Charles Wax's went from Kellyview up Roaring Fork to its side branch named Cane Patch, which it followed through a low pass in Roger's Ridge into the watershed of Black Creek, and then through White Oak Gap and Bear Branch to the waters of the North Fork of Powell River (there are two of them), and then over a low divide into Guest River. He never got to Wilson's. Ted was never seen alive again. Dr. John Wentz, back home in Pennsylvania, ordered his other son, Dan, to immediately return to Pennsylvania. John freely expressed the belief that Ted had been murdered by the minions of Calvin Pardee. He had his convictions printed in the newspapers nationwide.⁽¹⁾

Dr. John S. Wentz was the leader of a large family of anthracite coal mine owners who had become rich as part of the military industrial complex of the North in the Civil War. That family was intricately intermarried with similar families, such as the Leisenrings, Pardees, Kemmerers, and others⁽²³⁾. After the war they had developed in Virginia the largest soft coal mining conglomerate in the world. The corporate names were changeable, and included the Tinsalia, Virginia Coal and Iron, Stonega, Penn Virginia, and Westmoreland Companies in Virginia, and others in Pennsylvania too numerous to list.⁽²⁾

Calvin Pardee, Jr. had a very similar background. He was a third generation anthracite operator from Pennsylvania. The name 'Calvin' was recycled several times in the family, but the one of interest is designated as the "Junior". He was born in 1871. Somewhere along the line the family obtained "the Blackwood Coal and Coke Co." of Pottsville, Pa. The term "Blackwood" is derived from the family who started that corporation, which originally came from Front Royal, Virginia, but spread all over Pennsylvania, especially the anthracite areas. The corporate name was recycled countless times in various forms in both Pennsylvania and in Virginia and Kentuck. Pottsville is located 52 miles south of Wilkes-Barre, PA. , thus placing it in the same general area



LT. CAVIN PARDEE, JR.

as that inhabited by the Wentzes, Kemmerers, and Leisenrings. Calvin Pardee, Jr.'s family turned this corporation into a learning experience for Calvin. He kept its name in various forms for the rest of his life, and in fact after his death his family continued to operate under it. There is no record that Calvin ever came to Virginia. The concept was that this company would operate as a holding company, and not as an operating one. He made an exception for his coal camp on Black Creek, Wise Co., Va., Blackwood. He was a Second Lieutenant in the Spanish American War.

About 1873 Calvin Pardee, Sr. became intensively involved against the violent Molly McGuires, who were a militant group that started in Ireland in its war of independence from Britain. In Pennsylvania it became a labor and socialist movement venting its wrath against the railroads and the coal industry. Arson and murder were their trademark. Twenty four mine foremen and supervisors were murdered. The coal operators came together and hired the Pinkerton Detective Agency to protect themselves. The records do not specifically denote the other coal operators mentioned above, but it seems likely that all of them were involved in that labor dispute. Companies owned both by the Pardees and the Leisenrings lowered their miner's wages by 10%. Based on this, as well as their prominence in the region involved with the Molly McGuires, it is very likely that they were involved by the violence.^(3,,4,5,6,7,8,9, 10,11, 23)

Around 1887 Calvin's business empire moved into Eastern Kentucky, and Southwestern Virginia, all of which he ended up unifying under the banner of the Blackwood Land Co. For the first time he intended to both lease and to operate these properties. In 1897 he began a focused analysis of the Virginia Coal and Iron Co. of the Leisengrings, Wentzes, et al. He and his family bought 5440 acres of coal land contiguous to the VCI holdings.⁽²³⁾ In 1903 he built the mines, coke ovens, and camp at Blackwood, which was oddly enough on Black Creek. He leased 1500 acres on Roaring Fork on the western side of Black Creek from the Virginia Iron and Coal Company, and built a camp and mines named Roaring Fork there in 1905. This was mostly on land pioneered by Andrew "Bee Keeper" Sturgill and sold to VIC. In 1907 he bought 2,450 acres at the head of Roaring Fork from the Thruston Trust. Calvin Pardee, Jr. died in Hazelton, PA. of gangrenous appendicitis in 1918. Afterwards the Calvin family corporate interests built Pardee on the Sturgill land, and the camp of Calvin just west of Keokee ^{(12, 13, 14).}

The Blackwood companies mined both low splint, high splint, and Taggart seams of coal. Their trademark brand was “Red Bar Coal”, which designated their lump coal that was highly prized by home owners. In mining terminology a bar is a straight girder used to support a span of roof between two supports.⁽¹⁴⁾ The company paid a man to paint a wide strip of red paint on the sides of large blocks of coal that lay on top of the gons. When these railroad coal cars were parked on side tracks people from all around would bring their wheel barrows and haul off the blocks of painted Red Bar coal^(15,16, 17).

Blackwood’s Calvin and Pardee camps shut down in 1954, when they were bought out by John Kemmerer. The traditional mines of the camp of Blackwood shut down in the Great Depression, but sputtered along until the 1950’s as private leases. The land company continued to receive royalties from lease operations by other companies at Glenbrook in Harlan Co. Ky, and at Scotia at Oven Fork, Ky. until the 1970’s.

Judge John L. Leisenring, Jr. was born in Philadelphia in 1819. He was an engineer, and designed routes for railroads, and developed coal mines. He was active politically. His sister, Annie, married a Wentz, as did his daughter, Mary, whose husband was Dr. John Wentz. His daughter married Mahlon Sistie Kemmerer, a commoner. M. S. worked his way up the ladder within the engineering departments of the companies with which Judge was employed, and after his marriage Judge got him started in business. In 1881 these Pennsylvanians joined forces with the Virginians Rufus Ayers, Col. C. Bascom Slemph, General John Daniel Imboden and others to form what was to become the largest independent coal company in the world. Known by various names through the years, the one most consistently identified with this era was the Virginia Coal and Iron Company. Imperceptually at first Kemmerer gradually began to drift away from VCI and his relatives there, and in 1899 he founded the Colonial Coal and Coke Company. Their focus was one hollow to the east of Black Creek. John C. Haskell, acting as Kemmerer’s land agent, bought 10,000 acres on the North Fork of the Powell River next to present Norton, Va. The project became named Dorchester. Mahlon’s son, John L. Kemmerer, was president. Wise Coal and Coke Co., and Sutherland Coal and Coke Co. were bought out, and the surviving name of all these operations was the Wise Coke and Coal Company.

In 1902 M. S. Kemmerer founded the First National Bank of Norton. In 1862 the transcontinental railroad was started. Crossing the arid desolate plains of Wyoming presented the problems of scarcity of water and of coal for steam engines. Fortunately, Hamm’s Fork of the Green River provided plenty of both. M. S. founded the Kemmerer Coal Company at a city to be named after him, in 1897. Kemmerer Coal Co. of Wyoming was run primarily out of the Norton Bank Building by John Kemmerer, Sr., followed by first John Kemmerer, Jr. and then John “Jay” Kemmerer III. Mahlon died in 1925.^(6B, 17)

Let us return to John C. Haskell. He was born into an upper crust family in South Carolina of plantation owners, legislatures, and even a Speaker of the House of Representatives. He

joined the Confederate Army and was at Fort Sumpter, became an aide to General Joseph E. Johnson, and was under General Longstreet at the Battle of Mechanicsville, where he lost his right arm. After this he was on Robert E. Lee's staff before becoming a Col. in the artillery. Later he received a head wound. At Appomattox Lee gave him the honor of surrendering the artillery. His brother, Col. Alexander Haskell was selected to surrender the Cavalry. In a culture where even entry into the war had been a matter of honor, this selection speaks much about the Haskells. He married the daughter of General Wade Hampton, and became an attorney. In 1890 he became involved with General Daniel Imboden and his brother, Francis Marion, in their Virginia, Tennessee and Caroline Steel and Iron Co., and the associated South Atlantic and Ohio Railroad.⁽¹⁷⁾ This railroad was being built from Bristol to Appalachia to provide access to the outside world for the coal mined in western Wise County. In 1890 it went into bankruptcy. Haskell had just been made the SA&O's general manager. A very acrimonious conflict between the owners of the railroad and its creditors developed. Numerous law suits were filed. The owners moved all the rolling stock of the SA&O into the Big Stone Gap end of the line, while the creditors gathered in Bristol. Telegraph wires were cut, and rails were pulled up. Armed men were noted in each camp. War was anticipated. The two groups met at the door of Haskell's office, where he stood guard with a loaded pistol. He said "Get out of here, every damned Yankee son-of-a-bitch of you. He was most convincing, and the group broke up, allowing the legal processes to resolve the issues. After that oral tradition has Haskell doing business in his office with a loaded pistol setting on his desk.⁽⁹⁾ As a result of Haskell's actions in this chapter of our history, the first station west of Bristol had its name changed from 'Mountain' to 'Haskell Station'. Indeed, the hollow that runs from the top of Walker's Mountain to Benham's is called Haskell Station Road / Hollow. At this point M. S. Kemmerer snatched up Haskell, seemingly more for his capacity to deal with potentially violent conflicts than anything else. Indirect evidence suggests that Haskell helped Kemmerer with his Wyoming enterprise. If one were to Google the names 'Haskell & Kemmerer' one finds a surprising number of references to these two names occurring through the generations around Kemmerer, Wyoming. The same thing can be said about Googling the two names 'Kemmerer & Pardee'. The Blackwood Coal Co. kept offices in Kemmerer's Norton Kemmerer Building and at his Bank of Norton well into the twentieth century. Two things are abundantly clear, these three people / descendants were remarkably close, and that most of this activity is undocumented.⁽²⁰⁾ This suggests that much of that association was clandestine. He was not in Wyoming long. He returned to his roots in South Carolina, where he died in 1909.⁽¹⁹⁾

The question addressed in this essay is not 'what happened to Ted Leisenring. His body was found. A very professional autopsy was done, and the coroner's jury correctly found that he had shot himself

Land ownership in Wise County was a mess. Old world peoples poured past the frontier into the interior of the country ahead of the usual trappings of government. Indeed, it was worse than that. The governments of Europe ordered their citizens to not go there. The pioneers persisted in settling far west of where there was any such a thing as legal title to land, nor court systems for registering ownership. The Colony of Virginia, charged by its European master to halt settlement west of the New River, in fact established land companies to sell title to this land. The

settlers attempted to establish countries for themselves on the frontier independent of Britain, Spain, or France. They attempted to legalize these countries by buying land from the Indians. The Indians had no concept of private land ownership. The Revolution really messed things up. After the war was over the issue of what the victorious independent government of the Commonwealth of Virginia was to do about those land titles that it had issued in the West when it was a British colony took half a century to work its way through the court system. Even after the legal ownership of a tract of land was formalized, the practical issue of defining by reproducible surveys the location of the exact metes and bounds of each tract remained. The early surveys were often nonreproducible. Land was granted to more than one party. As a practical matter, pioneers just sat down where they wished, and ignored any and all problems of establishing legal title. Later governments made practical acknowledgement of this reality, and passed laws recognizing legal title to these 'squatters'. These laws were formally called 'laws of adverse possession', more commonly known as 'squatter's rights'. Large land grants were issued acknowledging that unspecified and undefined 'inclusions' of settled land existed within the larger grant, totally leaving future generations to work out the specific details.⁽²¹⁾ The lands bought by the various coal companies defined above were egregious examples of the worst of all these sins.

The process of working through this mess was for the coal company to buy the largest tracts that they could find, and then to approach the contesting owners of the inclusions one by one. Some of the adverse claims were instances of duplicate legal ownership, with two or three legal titles to the same land. The process to resolve this type of issue was for the coal companies to buy out the overlapping claims, if the competing owners would willingly sell. Many would not sell. Litigation was then tried, but there was no process to enforce the court's decisions. None of what follows can ever be proved, but the folk lore is thick with stories about it. Many of the larger coal companies then resorted to force. Many coal companies had 'gangs of thugs' who were given the responsibility of driving the squatters off of the contested lands. The names of the members of these 'gangs of thugs' are often mentioned by people living today. Even the descendants of these corporate thugs will tell you that their ancestor was a member. The process was usually one of the settler being approached by a company thug and advised to leave before bad luck began to happen to him. The first 'bad luck' was for the thugs to beat up the wife and children, and to throw them into the creek. If this did not work, the thug would ride up to the settler and say something like "that is a mighty fine cow that you have in the pasture. Have you seen her lately?" The squatter would then look for his cow, only to find that she has been shot. The next step in this process was to burn his barn. The last step was for the gang of thugs to surround the house at night, and to shoot its inhabitants. Traditional rumors are numerous among the descendants of these people, who say that 'Black Mountain is full of such graves'. When asked about the missing settler company representatives would say something like 'Old John just went up North'.⁽²²⁾

Now, back to the original question – why was Dr. John Wentz so sure that the corporate interests of the Pardee family were responsible for the death of his son, Ted? After all, the Wentz, Leisenring, Kemmerer, Pardee, and et al were very closely intermarried and otherwise interconnected? The author's observation is that the local general population believes that he

was shot by an angry squatter whose land was being taken from him. They either do not know about the coroner's jury's report, or discount it as having been incompetent. But Dr. Wentz not only accepted that Ted had killed himself, but he publically apologized in the newspapers for his original accusation . There is no indication that he ever considered the possibility that an unhappy land holder had done it. Let us see what we know about the psychological ambience surrounding Dr. Wentz's original reaction. All the listed Pennsylvania families discussed in this essay most certainly were deeply involved in the Molly McGuire mess. They all had either participated in either the Civil War or in the Spanish American War. They were no strangers to violence. They were likely the very ones who had hired the Pinkerton Detectives to counteract the insurgents. Indeed, they seem to have likely provoked them when they cut their income by 10%. There was friction in the greater Leisenring clan, evidenced by the Kemmerers forming their own companies separate from the Leisengrings, and moving to Wyoming. Haskell was hired by Kemmerer. There is no evidence what position Haskell held within the Kemmerer structure. His special skill set seems to have been dealing with violence. One notes with interest his apparent personality change from a model Southern gentleman to a corporate brawler. One wonders about the effects on his behavior from that head injury near the end of the Civil War. This author can find no evidence of violence in Kemmerer, Wyoming. Indirect evidence presented above shows that the Pardees grew much closer to the Kemmerers than to the Leisenrings.

Perhaps the answer to this issue lay within a forgotten incident in the Molly McGuire conflict involving Pardee in an act of violence or of murder. Perhaps Dr. Wentz's mind immediately jumped to that memory when Ted died. One cannot believe that Wentz's reaction was without reason.

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5 – “Calvin Pardee” - “Mining and Metallurgy” issue 150, by the American Institute of Mining and Metallurgical Engineers” June 1919

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A - <https://m.facebook.com/media/set/?vanity=246329439101547&set=a.248911382176686>

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C - Pottsville location – see above #A

7 – Lonesome Pine Office on Youth – Life in the Coal Camps of Wise County

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22 – Harry Caudill in his Night Comes to the Cumberlands, and short stories, and John Fox, Jr. in his Trail of the Lonesome Pine wrote cleaned up versions of such events.

<https://muse.jhu.edu/book/28701>

23 – DOCUMENTATIONS OF THE CLOSE ASSOCIATIONS BETWEEN THE LEISENRINGS AND PARDEES

A – In 1885 the mining companies owned by the Pardees and Leisenrings simultaneously lowered the wages of their miners by 10% during the Molly McGuire revolt. These companies were located near Mauk Chunk.

<https://www.nytimes.com/1885/01/20/archives/working-at-reduced-wages.html>

B – In 1929 several Pardees maintained business offices in the Kemmerer Building in Norton, Va. 'Crawford's Weekly' – June 1, 1929 'Virginia Chronicle'

C – Find a Grave RE Mary Price Kemmerer Leisenring

D – Markle Bank & Navigation Co, founded in part by Pardee, shipped the first coal from Luzern Co. Pa. on the Leisenring owned Lehigh Coal and Navigation Co. RR

<http://www.pagenweb.org/~luzerne/patk/hazhist.htm>

E - "Pennsylvania Heritage" – winter 1996 edition

<http://paheritage.wpengine.com/article/jewel-crown-old-king-coal-eckley-miners-village/>

F – Ario Pardee owned the Beaverton RR, and the Lehigh RR – both used by Leisenring interests

G – Obituary of Oct. 3, 2021 mentioning Al Kemmerer and Lois Pardee

<https://goodgriefokansas.org>

H – script collected from Hazelton Area – Lehigh Coal & Navigation Company (Leisenring owned); and from C. Pardee & Co.

I – Obituary of Helen Lee Pardee Leisenring of Luzerne, Penn. (Hazelton, Mauk Chunk area)

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