

# WHEEL TRACKS



SERVICE ABOVE SELF - HE PROFITS MOST WHO SERVES BEST

Service Publication of the Yanceyville (N. C.) Rotary Club for Nov. 10, 1942

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## Diminutive Biographical Sketches

Rotarian: John Henry Gunn.

Club Classification: Sheriff of Caswell County.

Club Fellowship Appellation: John Henry.

Distinguishing Attributes: Modesty, unassumingness, honesty, truthfulness, kindness, tenderness and true-blueness in fidelity and loyalty.

The Gunn family of Caswell has a reputation for precociousness and first-handiness, a grandsire having been fast on the trigger in firing the first cannon at Yorktown. (See monument to the memory of Starling Gunn at the ancestral home one mile, as the crow flies, from Yanceyville, now owned by the descendants of LaFayette Murray.) The Gunns have also been prolific, and have produced many little Gunns.

If I am not mistaken, I first saw John Henry at a "shingling bee," when, community-spirited, we were nailing the first shingles on the decayed roof of the old Yanceyville Co-Educational Academy (formerly Dan River Institute under the principalship of Archibald C. Lindsay and Archibald E. Henderson) under the inspiration and leadership of Nanseen Siman Asswad, a native of Jerusalem and graduate of Guilford College who had followed to Yanceyville his fellow-schoolmate, Dr. Steve Malloy. I went to school with John Henry, and we have been friends for nearly 45 years. There was nothing mean or little in his make-up then; he never took an unfair advantage and he never hurt the feelings of anyone; his life and character have weathered the storms of all these years, and he is the same square-shooting, lovable personality today as he was when he was commuting to school, via horseback, from his home midway between Page's Mill and Allison's Shops.

John Henry Gunn was born Feb. 6, 1882, a son of Hiram L. and Virginia (Jennie) Jones Gunn. He first married Hattie Smith, a lady of excellent character, piety and zeal, but this happy union was ended with her death in 1933, after she had borne him three fine sons and a lovely daughter, namely: Rotarian William Gunn, Henry Gunn, Elvin Gunn and Rotary-Ann Annie Gunn McKinney. Incidentally, John Henry is the first of our Rotarians to have the honor of father-and-son clubship and that of father-and-son-in-law (Rotarian Clyde McKinney.) On Dec. 29, 1938, John Henry was again happily married, this time to Miss Elizabeth Tolbert, of Greenwood, S. C., a schoolteacher of personal charms and cultural attainments who has proven an ideal mate. The Reverend Clem P. Williamson, Negro preacher and warm friend unto the Sheriff, claims some credit for this, in that he says he wrestled mightily with the Lord that he might provide him with another good wife—even after the Sheriff had lost all hope. No children have yet been born of this mating.

John Henry's popularity is attested in that he has been elected Sheriff of Caswell County seven times. This coming December he starts on his seventh term, for another four years. He so conducts himself and his office that he has few, if any, enemies. So kindly and inoffensive are his manners that even the sinners he arrests appreciate his gentlemanly courtesy and kindness. He is a Mason, a Methodist, a Democrat and a Charter Rotarian. He is intensely proud of his Masonic membership, stretching over a period of about 35 years. His Methodism goes back further than that. He is fond of sports, especially fishing and deer-hunting—and he is a pastmaster over the barbecue pit. Another first in his life was the ownership of the first second-hand Ford to come to Caswell (purchased from John A. Massey and dubbed "The Redhorse.")

John Henry is a natural-born machinist, and loves the hum of wheels. It was his early ambition to be a railroad engineer, and he followed his cousin, Richard (Buster) Gunn to North Dakota, with this intention, but he was detoured by Buster's illness and decision to return home. North Dakota lost a good citizen and the railroads a potential engineer of fidelity and safeness. Sheriff John Henry Gunn exemplifies the best in Rotary fellowship and the finest in friendship and citizenship.