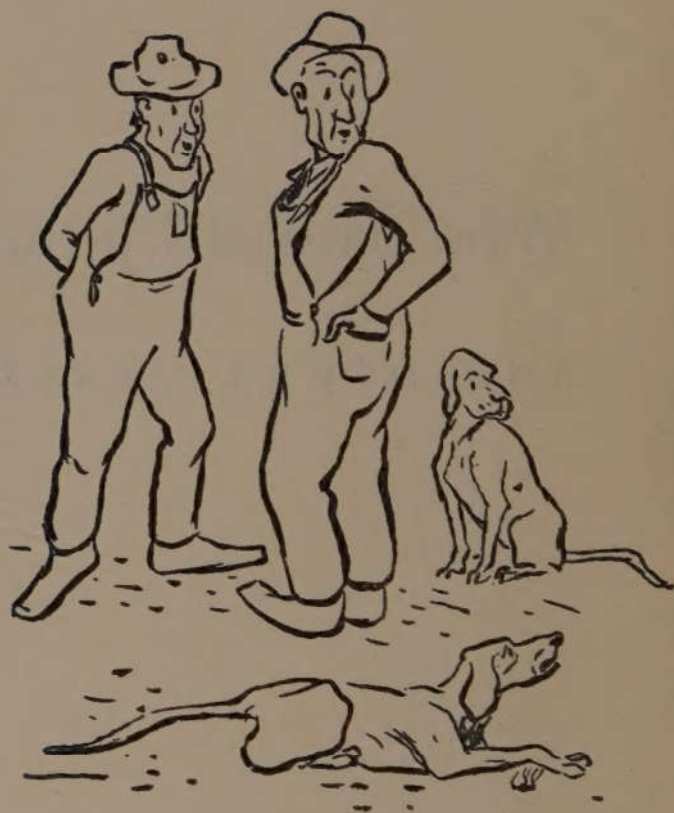




Who
Blowed UP
the Church House?





AND OTHER Ozark Folk Tales

ILLUSTRATIONS BY GLEN ROUNDS

New York

Who
Blowed UP
the Church
House?



COLLECTED BY Vance Randolph

WITH NOTES BY HERBERT HALPERT

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The singing teacher just wiped his hands with a red handkerchief, and then he rubbed a little speck of soot off'n his fine celluloid collar. "That will learn bears not to monkey with me," says he, and marched off down the road to the old barn where they was having the singing school.

GEOMETRY IS WHAT DONE IT

ONE TIME there was a fellow come from up around Joplin somewheres, and he says his name is Tandy Simpson. There was an old brass cannon in the courthouse yard, and the first thing Tandy done was hire some men to load it on a wagon. The sheriff figured Tandy was trying to steal it for the brass, but Tandy says he is just going down to the freight depot and he will fetch the cannon right back. The sheriff he went along to make sure, and Tandy had them fellows put the old gun on the scales. It weighed seven hundred and fifty pounds. So then Tandy hauled it back to the courthouse yard, and paid the fellows their wages, and bought everybody a drink besides. "I'm kind of crazy about brass cannons," he says, and then he got on the train and left. The sheriff says Tandy is crazy all right, but he figured there ain't no harm in him.

The next we seen of Tandy was way along in August, when he come down with a bunch of rich people from Kansas City. They all drunk whiskey like water and spent their money the same way, and some of them fancy women was worse'n the menfolks. The whole outfit danced and swum and fished and celebrated all over the place. And gamble? You never seen anything like it. Some of them fellows would bet on anything. If two birds was setting on a fence, they would bet maybe a hundred dollars

which one would fly first. They must have bet thousands of dollars on shooting matches, and most of them was good shots, too. They had a little tin box that was knowed as the fishpool, and each man would put money in it every day, and the fellow that caught the biggest fish took the pot. And every night the whole bunch would make up another pool to bet on something, even if it was only what the weather was going to be like next morning.

One day a lot of them people was setting in chairs out front of the hotel, across the street from the courthouse yard. They got to guessing how much each other weighed, and somebody brought the bathroom scales out there, and they was betting how heavy people was, and then weighing them on the scales. Everybody took it good-natured except old lady Carleton, and she is too fat anyhow. Tandy says he was losing money at this foolishness. He says it ain't possible to guess a person's weight very accurate, because the human body is made of so many different kinds of stuff. If a man was solid meat clear through, says Tandy, a fellow could figure his height and girth and make a mighty close guess by geometry.

"Geometry, my eye!" says a skinny little man. "You see that statue over by the courthouse? Same kind of stone all the way through, ain't it? But I bet you couldn't guess within four hundred pounds how much it'll weigh." The two of them walked over to the courthouse, with the whole crowd trailing along behind. Tandy he studied the statue mighty careful. "There ain't no regular shape to it," says he. "Geometry can't get a hold of a thing like that. You show me something that's round, or square, or oblong—" The skinny little fellow stopped him right there. "All right," he says, "let's see what geometry can do with that brass cannon." Tandy studied the old gun mighty careful. "That's better," says he. "There's something that geometry can

sink her teeth into. I'll bet a thousand dollars I can guess its weight closer'n you can."

With that the whole bunch begun to argue, and finally they decided each man would put five hundred dollars into the box, and whoever guessed closest would take the pot. The sheriff heard about it, so he called one of them fellows outside. "I know exactly how much that gun weighs," says he. So the fellow give the sheriff some money, and the sheriff told him the cannon weighed seven hundred and fifty pounds.

They all watched while the boys loaded the cannon on a wagon and took it down to the freight depot. When they got it on the scales, the goddam thing weighed eight hundred and two pounds! And the cards showed that Tandy Simpson's guess was eight hundred, and the next best guess was seven hundred and fifty; the rest of them run all the way from six hundred to fifteen hundred. So they give the money to Tandy Simpson, and he says guesswork may be all right in its place, but geometry is more dependable. The fellow that guessed seven hundred and fifty was pretty mad, but he seen the weighing himself, and them scales was inspected by the Government, so he couldn't make no holler. The sheriff went fishing up on White River somewhere, and he never showed his face in town till them people had all went back to Kansas City.

The sheriff done a lot of thinking while he was on that fishing trip. Soon as he got back, somebody seen him a-poking a stick into the old brass cannon. Then he got the blacksmith to come over with a grabhook, and pretty soon they drug out a big piece of sheet lead, rolled up like a newspaper. "I see how this here geometry works," says the sheriff. "Tandy must have sneaked over here in the night, and rammed that stuff down the muzzle." The blacksmith sold the lead for junk, and it weighed just fifty pounds. The other two pounds was some kind of gummy plaster,

that Tandy had put in so the lead wouldn't come out while they was weighing the cannon.

THE BROWN MARE

ONE TIME there was a man named John Cecil, and he had a little mare that could run like the wind. She was kind of dun-colored, so they called her Brown Lady. The Cecil outfit matched her against a gray horse that had been winning races all over the country, and the gray horse belonged to a fellow they called Houston. Mister John thought maybe there was something underhanded going on, so he got another mare that looked just like Brown Lady, but she couldn't run. They put the other mare in Brown Lady's stall, and Mister John he stayed in the loft every night and waited for something to happen.

A couple of nights before the race he heard a noise outside, and here come three men into the stable. The leader was Houston, the fellow that owned the gray horse. The three men beat the mare with clubs until they knew she would be too stiff and sore to win any race, and then they went away. Mister John saw all this, but he just kept quiet.

When Saturday morning come around the Houston crowd was there, bold as brass. They brought all the money, cattle, and stuff they could get a hold of, and bet everything on the gray horse. The gray horse was pretty good, but Brown Lady was in fine shape, and she beat the gray horse by four lengths. So the Houston crowd lost all their money and other property, and it served them right.

The boys made up a song about the race, and it went something like this: