THE TOWN BRANCH

CHAPTER ONE

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There was once a small valley in what came to be called The Bluegrass that was described in fairy tale-like terms by the white men who came upon it. Clear flowing springs gushed forth from limestone ledges throughout the valley. Most of these springs were to be given the names of the men who claimed them but a few were named because they sank underground and then rose again; these were the Sinking Springs. There were Cave Springs and a deep spring that reflected the bright blue sky and was called the Blue Hole. The co-joined spring's water formed a pristine stream which was called at different times the Middle Fork of the Elkhorn, McConnell's Creek or Run, and the Town Fork or Branch.

The banks of the creek, "were dotted with wonderful wildflowers 'full and perfect as if cultivated by the hand of a florist', columbines, pinks, tulips, daisies, lilies, violets, hyacinths and the splendid crown imperial all growing in riotous profusion right down to the water's edge." The beauty of the stream and its flowers might have had some appeal to the men seeing them but these were practical men looking for land to settle and farm. They noticed the deer, elk and buffalo grazing in the cane breaks, wild clover and wild rye and knew their horses and family cows would have rich pasture on which to graze.

The pre-historic people had set fires periodically to clear the underbrush which left wide areas free of trees so they would have few trees or brush to clear to before setting out fields of corn. There were groves of trees in places. The huge Burr Oak was very resistant to fire and they sheltered walnut, ash and wild cherry trees which provided building material for forts, stations and cabins and firewood.

Most men had trouble expressing the beauty they saw. A frontier preacher was deep into his sermon in which he was trying to tell how wonderful heaven would be; then he paused as he lacked the words to describe heaven. At last he burst forth, "Heaven is a Kentucky kind of place." His listeners understood. If Kentucky wasn't a Heaven it was certainly an Eden.

A handful of fur traders and Long Hunters entered Kentucky in the 1760's and then came the surveyors of 1774 and 1775. Land seeking parties swarmed into the Blue Grass. Daniel Boone led a party that cut a trail through the Cumberland Gap to Boonesborough on the Kentucky River for a North Carolina Company. In her 'The Founding of Lexington' Carolyn Murray-Wooley says, "most of those who claimed land in the area (Lexington) were from south-central Pennsylvania, then called the 'back-parts of the country."

There was a smattering Swede, French, English and Germans (called Dutch in Kentucky) descendants among the incoming men but the bulk of them were Scots-Irish. For several generations these people had lived on the frontier and, "they were accustomed to life in the

wilderness and well suited to the dangerous task of claiming the Indians lands as their own." Taking the Indian's lands was not an easy task. Many of the men soon to be listed suffered grievous wounds and even death trying to wrestle the land from brave men defending their ancient hunting grounds.

The McConnell party had finished claiming lands on the North Elkhorn and moved over to a large spring on the Town Branch which had not yet been surveyed. This party, led by William McConnell, included Francis, and Andrew McConnell, William Alexander, John McClelland, David Perry, Charles Lecompte, John Smith, John Maxwell, Hugh Shannon, William Lain, Cyrus McCracklin, Robert Patterson and perhaps others not told of. A rather colorful, over-the-top and racist account tells of the McConnell party's, "Discovery and Naming of Lexington", by Lexington's early historian George W. Ranck:

"Clothed in their quaint pioneer style of buckskin pantaloons, deerskin leggings, linsey hunting-shirt, and peltry cap, and armed with a trusty flint-lock rifle, a hatchet and scalping knife, they toiled through the trackless woods and almost impenteble cane-breaks in the direction of the future Lexington. On or about the 5th of June (1775), the approach of night ended one of their solitary and dangerous marches; and glad to rest, the tired hunters camped on a spot afterward known successively as McConnell's Station, Royal's Spring and the Headley Distillery.---The spring from which the pioneers drank---still exists, with stream as cool, clear and grateful as then."

"After posting one of their number as the 'look out' for the 'redskin varmints' who were ever on the alert to slay the 'paleface,' the rest seated themselves around a blazing brush-heap on logs and buffalo hides, and with hunger for sauce, supped with gusto upon inevitable 'jerk(y)' and parched corn."

"While eating their simple meal, they talked with enthusiasm of the beautiful country they had just traveled over, and surprised and delighted with the prospect about them, they determined that their place of settlement should be around the very spot where they were encamped. And no wonder they were delighted with their new- found home, for all the rich acres they had seen in all 'Kan-tuck-ee' these were the fattest and most fertile.---the elk, the deer the bear the buffalo crowded the woods with juicy food. They forgot the sulking savage and the dangers on every hand, and glowed with the excitement which only a hunter can feel, as they surveyed the virgin glories of the red-man's most cherished hunting-grounds, and realized the full truth of the wondrous tales they had heard of a distant El Dorado."

"The name of the settlement that was to be was discussed with animation. One suggested was 'York', another 'Lancaster', but both were dropped with a shout for 'Lexington!' as the conversation turned to the strange news that had slowly crept though the wilderness, and which, after being weeks on the way, they had just heard, of how King George's troops on the 19th of April, had called American's 'rebels' and shot them down like dogs at Lexington in

Massachusetts colony.' The story of Lexington's christening-the historic fact of how she got her name, is as romantic as the legend of the beautiful Princess Pocahontas, and in incident far more interesting, because more true than the fabulous one told of ancient Rome." Ranck could get carried away when telling of Lexington; a city he dearly loved.

As they would need a base from which to scout out their claims the men helped William McConnell build a simple half-face cabin. The pioneer Joseph Doddridge said that the half-face cabin "was of the following form; the back part of it was sometimes a large log; at the distance of eight to ten feet from this two stakes were set in the ground inches apart; and at a distance of eight to ten feet from these two more to receive the ends of poles for the sides of the camp; the whole slope of the roof was from front to back; the covering was of slabs, skins or blankets, or, if in the spring of the year bark of the hickory or ash trees; the front was entirely left open; the fire was built directly before this opening; the cracks between the logs were filled with moss, the dry leaves for a bed. It was thus that a couple of men in a few hours will construct for themselves---(a) tolerably comfortable defense from the inclemency of the weather. A little more pains would have made a hunting camp a defense against the Indians---but this precaution I believe was never attempted to; hence the hunters were often surprised and killed in their camps."

The men went out as Carolyn Murray-Wooley quoted and "Did Build Several Improvements and did cast lots for same." They, "unanimously agreed to Rasied (sic) corn at different places." She then quoted Robert Patterson, "When I came out in company with others to improve we sometimes numbered the improvements and drew lots for them by their numbers---when I made an improvement for myself I sometimes marked it with the initials of my own name, or that of a friend, marking few in my own name for fear of being called a land jobber, a name much detested in the back parts of Pennsylvania where I came from." Patterson would claim twenty improvements and one for his father out on Cane Run.

If a man gained military rank in his later years, men referred to that rank when telling of a man's younger years before he gained that rank. A cabin was, "Built on Col. Patterson's Sinking Spring." The location of this spring isn't known for sure but it could be the sinking spring on the grounds of the Old Eastern State Hospital at Newtown Road and Fourth Street.

Alexander McConnell stated that he and the McConnell's improved on the "waters of Wolf Run" (a small tributary of the Town Branch.) The men assisted in building a cabin, "Where William McConnell afterward lived, the place near the center of the improvements, and there continued until the corn was laid by",(given a final weeding.) This was likely the second cabin built for William McConnell.

Another McConnell, Francis, "Did draw a cabin---Rais (sic) a Crop of Corn nigh to (Cave) Spring." He would lose this site later that year. The men built a cabin for Francis at his favorite improvement, the Big Pond (which was located in the present Beaumont Park). The pond and the house were later discovered to be within the bounds of an older military survey. Francis was

killed by Indians at Fort Harrodsburg in 1777. Most of Francis's improvements was lost to his heirs by the overlapping claim of the Blue Hole of Simon Kenton. "Because however, of those small tomahawk improvements, one of which was done by Hugh Shannon at the Cove Spring (off Lane Allen Road, at the intersection of Beacon Hill Road) part of the preemption claim was saved." The brick house that stands today at this site was built by Jesse Lamme in 1806.

The Blue Hole Spring, which is at the headwaters of the western branch of Wolf Run is a few yards off today's Parker's Mill Road north of Lane. William McConnell had an improvement here. "Cabin of William McConnell that he traded to Simon Kenton, who sold it to Joseph Frazier, at the Blue Hole."

"A cabin built by Francis McConnell and later sold to Francis Keene at a spring (now under Gardenside Lake) on a branch of Wolf Run. There had been an earlier Indian hunting camp at the forks of this branch and the branch from the Blue Hole (at the intersection of Parker's Mill Road and Cross Key Road."

"A cabin built by John McCrakin at a spring (just south of Versailles Pike on a very small branch of Wolf Run in the Colony subdivision."

"Another cabin (built by John McCrackin) for John May, about a mile northwest of the Mansfield Spring (this was at a pond at the old Henry Clay High School on East Main Street.)

A cabin was, "built by a set of improvers at Cave Spring (north of Dunkirk Drive in the Cardinal Valley subdivision. There had been a pre-historic Indian camp at this site."

Yet another cabin was "built by improvers at the spring of William McConnell." It is in the valley south of Central Rock's block- making plant. There will be much more written of this site later.

Another "Cabin of Robert Patterson on his 400 acre settlement (the site of the cabin was on Byars Street in Davis Bottom south of the High Street viaduct." Much of this area was recently bulldozed down to construct a connecter road.

"Improvement-James Greer-Sinking Springs near Russell Cave Pike, inside New Circle Road."

"Improvement John Maxwell (Maxwell Spring is south of Euclid Avenue between Rose and South Limestone." George Ranck said of Maxwell, "In pioneer times, he owned a large part of the land now included in the limits of Lexington, but true to the old hunter nature, it rapidly slipped from his grasp." This was a common happening as Ranch said of Robert Patterson, "like many others of his simple hearted companions, was indulgent and negligent in business matters, and, like them, lost most of his extensive land property to shrewd rascals."

There were a number of land-seeking parties that that came to the Town Branch in the spring

of 1775. One consisted of "Joseph Lindsey, Wm. Lindsey, Patrick Jordon, Garret Jordon, John Vance and others." They were in camp as it was a rainy day but, "Patrick Jordon went alone down the fork on which they were encamped and discovered a large spring on the north side of, and a short distance from the fork---when he returned to camp and told of the spring Joseph Lindsey---said he would have it, and promptly offered two guineas (British coins, for Jordon) to go with him and show it. They went together taking axes, and made an 'improvement'-cut poles and built a cabin, 3 or 4 logs high and about ten foot square, girdled some trees at the head of the spring, made a brush heap or two, and cut the initials J.L. on a tree---the same kind of improvement usually made at other places."

Once the improvements had been made the men returned to the North Elkhorn where they had left "provisions (flour and corn) working tools etc. In a few days, the brothers Jordon returned with Joseph Lindsey---and assisted him to plant-—corn, and then left him, Lindsey declaring he meant to live there."

"In September 1775, Patrick Jordon went by and found Lindsey living there in a camp he had built; besides the plow irons, wedges, hoes, axes---Lindsey had roasting ears (corn) and snap beans, the first Jordon had seen in the country. In July 1776, he called there again, and saw two acres of corn enclosed in a fence. Lindsey was not there, it was troublesome times on account of Indians; the people were scary, and had generally left their 'improvements' and had gone into stations for security." Lindsey had gone to Harrodsburg south of the Kentucky River.

A secondary reason Lindsey might have had to leave his improvement was that in May of 1776 Isaac Shelby was with military surveyors selecting land when he came to Lindsey's, "And he liked it; and said he would lay his father's warrant on it." Lindsey lost his land and was later killed at the Battle of Blue Licks in 1782. Isaac Shelby would go on to become Kentucky's first governor.

Mention has already been made of the McCelland Station being abandoned. There were no stations above the Kentucky River from then until 1779. There was a militia in Kentucky and every man able to carry a rifle belonged to it. Robert Patterson, who Ranck said was, "tall and handsome", had served 6 months as a Ranger in Pennsylvania and was made an Ensign in Captain Levi Todd's Militia Company at Harrodsburg. He was directed to take 25 men and establish a fort on the Town Branch. He was not a trained military engineer and selected a poor site for a fort as the spot was subject to flooding and sat with a sharp rise of ground on one side and a gradual sloping rise on the other. Any enemy could look down on the fort and fire into it with rifles or small cannon.

A colorful account was given of Patterson's dispatch to the Town Branch by George W. Ranck. "At the head of twenty-five men he commenced his march for the beautiful and fertile garden spot he had visited four years before and had never forgotten."

The party reached its destination the last day of the month (March), and encamped---at a magnificent spring whose grateful waters, in an unusual volume, emptied into a stream nearby, whose green banks were gemmed with the brightest flowers. The discovery of the spring determined the location of the little garrison, and bright and early the next day, the 1st of April, the axes of the stout pioneers were at work; trees were felled, a space was cleared, and a blockhouse surrounded by a stockade, and commanding the spring, was soon underway. This rude but powerful defense was quickly completed, as no unnecessary labor was spent on it."

One 'stout pioneer' who didn't want to put any 'unnecessary labor' in the fort was Josiah Collins. Josiah had cut down and hewed into a square timber a two foot thick Burr Oak for the first log that went into the blockhouse. Josiah, like many of the men who first came into Kentucky were more into hunting the wild animals, locating land or scouting for Indians than they were hard labor. When George Gray asked him to help look for five stray horses Josiah was soon out of sight.

The two men were absent for five days and it was thought they had been taken by the Indians. When they returned the one- room blockhouse was "pretty well up and they slept in it" Josiah gleefully reported, as he didn't have to work on it after returning.

"The logs for the walls were chopped out, provided with ports (portholes to fire rifles through) and 'raised'; the long and wide clapboards; rough from the axe and secured by wooden pins, formed the roof; trees split in two, and cut to proper lengths made the floor, a substantial slab door was provided, and these, together with an opening to admit light and carry off the smoke, constituted the block house" said Ranck. Thirty acres were cleared by the garrison and corn was planted. This field became the city 'Commons' and was shared by all.

A month after the blockhouse was erected John Morrison built a nearby cabin for his family. Mrs. Morrison was said to have been the first white woman to live at the station. By stating she was the first white women did that imply that a black woman might have preceded her? The first non-Indian to reach Boonesborough had been a Black slave woman. She also had the first non-Indian baby born in Kentucky. A baby sired by her white master.

Only twelve men and Mrs. Morrrison remained at the blockhouse during Colonel John Bowman's Campaign against the Indians in Ohio. She heard Indians prowling around her cabin at at night but was never attacked.

Despite Patterson's establishment of the blockhouse there was a question in some men's minds if there was a blockhouse there in the spring of 1779. The following notes are taken from Collin's 'Historical Sketches of Kentucky' detailing depositions taken in 1804:

Collins said, "It appears Lexington was not a place of note before Col. Bowman's Expeditions was set afoot in May of 1779. Col. Benjamin Harrison deposed that he, 'Never could learn that

Lexington really did exist at the time of Bowman's Expedition."

Isaac Ruddle deposed that about the middle of April 1779, he removed from Logan's Station near Stanford, Lincoln County, and settled a station near the Bourbon County line on the southern fork of the Licking River, called Ruddle's or Hinkston's Station. 'On the way he passed by where Lexington now is, and there were no settler's there. John Burger deposed that they went from Logan's Station with Isaac Ruddle to establish his station, and that when they passed Lexington there were some cabins, but no people living there."

"William McKee deposed that the last of May or June of 1779 he and several others came from Boonesborough to go to the Shawnee Town", under Bowman. We went to Col. John Todd's cabin on the waters of the Hickman (creek), lay there all night, started the next morning to find some men at Elkhorn." A Ralph Morgan deposes that they encamped at Todd's spring---about two miles from Lexington.

McKee was confused as Todd's wasn't on the Hickman but on the South Elkhorn. John Todd fought at the Battle of Point Pleasant and established a fort where he was joined by his younger brothers Robert and Levi. While serving in the Virginia Legislature he introduced a bill to emancipate the slaves. In 1778 he took part in George Rogers Clark's conquest of Illinois and was second in command in Kentucky to Clark when he led the pursuing force from Bryan Station. He was buried in a common grave at the Blue Licks.

William McKee found a cabin, "I think the cabin was called Maj. John Morrison's cabin, now called Lexington; we missed the trail, we could not find it." McKee wasn't the only man to lose a trail. "Sen. 'Old' John South deposed---that he started from Boonesborough with some militia of Captain John Holder's Company. 'Capt. John Holder told me he had orders from Col. Bowman to meet him in Lexington---the first night we missed our way to Lexington, and encamped; in the next morning we sent out spies to hunt where Lexington now stands; thence we marched toward the mouth of the Licking River." Present day Cincinnati, Ohio lays just across the Ohio River from the mouth of the Licking River.

There were men who couldn't find Lexington's blockhouse but it was there. David Mitchell deposed that "He was not in Bowman's Expedition---but at the time was a resident in Lexington; he killed meat for the garrison while the army was out. He recollected 14 citizens coming from Harrodsburg to settle Lexington,---Robert Patterson and John Morrison were two of them." Josiah Collins deposed, "his residence was in Lexington having moved there in April---."

Robert Patterson deposed that, "he (was) an inhabitant of Lexington and---was ordered into Bowman's Expedition and he left Lexington about May 15, 1779. Todd's, Holder's and Logan's companies rendezvoused at Lexington." Captain Todd said Colonel Bowman had directed him, "to leave sufficient number of men to protect Lexington." This must have been the twelve men left at the blockhouse.

The plan for attacking the Shawnee village Colonel Bowman gave to his men was a poor one and the Shawnee warriors came swarming out of the village. Only the heroic actions and fighting capabilities of John Holder's Boonesborough men held back the Shawnee long enough for Bowman to withdraw most of his troops. There would be many bands of settlers to leave Kentucky and cross into Ohio and Indiana to fight the Indians. Some had limited success and others did not fare so well. There is not space here to tell in detail of these raids across the Ohio.

The heat of the summer gave way to a cool fall. "Robert Patterson, John Maxwell, James Masterson, William and Alexander McConnell and the two Lindsey's occupied the blockhouse. The rest of the men sheltered themselves by bark coops within the stockade." Others lived in flimsy cabins just outside the stockade.

"The pioneers had never known a winter in Kentucky to set in so early; and continue so long," says Ranck. "Snow and ice were on the ground without a thaw from November to the succeeding March. The small streams were solid ice. Snow fell repeatedly, but as it did not melt it became almost impassable for man or beast, and it was only with the greatest difficulty that the hunters were able to find such of the wild animals as had not been starved or frozen to death. As the corn had been destroyed in the summer, bread was scarcely seen in the fort, and when it was, a single Johnnie-cake was divided into a dozen parts distributed and made to serve two meals. The use of bread ceased entirely, long before the winter was over. On one occasion when Colonel Todd returned to the fort almost famished the provisions were so nearly exhausted that his wife could offer him nothing but a gill of milk and a little piece of hard bread two inches square and this was turned over in silence to his starved servant."

"The cattle, after starving to death for want of fodder, were devoured by the inmates of the station, and from the time the cattle died until spring the settlers subsisted on venison, and water; clothing was insufficient. The roughly built cabins let in the piercing cold, and the firewood was chopped from trees incased in walls of snow and ice. Freezing and starving-such was the condition of the heroic settlers of Lexington, through this long and fearful winter of suffering."

Conditions were terrible in the stations but they were worse for those settlers struggling through the wilderness over the Boone Trace. There were no shelters along the Trace and entire families perished in the deep snow and ice. 1779-1780 came down in history as 'The Hard Winter.' I will write of the suffering of those on the Trace in my book, 'The Boone Trace.'