
Bits and Pieces

of Hardin County History

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ELIZABETHTOWN'S SASSAFRAS PLANT

The Great Depression of the 1930's had held sway in Elizabethtown and Hardin County, just as it had in the rest of the country, for several years. Many were unemployed, and men would do about any kind of honest labor to make a few cents to feed their families.

Talk of a plant locating in Elizabethtown that might provide jobs to men willing to work hard began in the summer of 1937. A big meeting was held at the Hardin County courthouse, and a large crowd turned out to hear George Glaub of Cincinnati outline his plans. He proposed to build a plant to process stumps and roots of sassafras trees into an oil. This oil was in great demand at that time, primarily for use in making patent medicines and as a flavoring for root beer, a popular soft drink.

The audience, consisting of local farmers, civic leaders, and city and county officials, was very enthusiastic.

The farmers pledged about 1800 acres of sassafras at the very first meeting. The City of Elizabethtown agreed to furnish a three-acre tract on which the plant was to be built. The company proposed to buy all the sassafras the farmers would deliver at \$4.00 per ton, and to take it at all times during the year.

In addition, the factory agreed to furnish power stump-pullers to farmers without charge, or would arrange to get the wood with its own labor, but much preferred delivery by the farmers. The company needed at least twenty tons a day, but would buy the wood in any amount as it was delivered.

However, not a great amount was sold by the farmers. Most of the stumps were pulled out by plant personnel, with the farmers only too glad to have the land cleared free of charge.

This opportunity to get rid of sassafras appealed to the farmer, because he considers it a weed. And to find someone willing to buy it, or remove it free of charge, was a real bonanza. In addition, it could be sold at any time of the year, thus providing work when the farmer was not busy with his other crops.

Dynamite, tractors, and log chains were used to pull the stumps from the ground. Only stumps and roots were processed. The farmer kept the part of the tree above the ground and cut it into cord wood and either used it himself or sold it for fuel.

The plant in Elizabethtown employed from 35 to 50 men, most of whom worked in the woods.

This plant was said to be the only big one of its kind in the country, and ninety percent of all the sassafras oil for patent medicines made in the United States at that time was extracted at the Elizabethtown plant. The oil was also used as a base for root beer and as a scent for soap.

The actual processing began with the delivery of the stumps to the plant. Huge guillotine-like splitters cut the stumps into pieces.

After it was cut by the stump splitters, the chunks of wood and bark went on a conveyor belt to a machine called a "wood hog." The hog ground the wood into smaller chips.

There was a huge blower under the hog. It blew the chips through a pipe to a bin on the third floor of the plant. That bin had a capacity of thirty tons.

Openings in the bottom of the bin fed the chips into the top of one of four big stills, each 3-1/2 feet in diameter and ten feet high, capable of holding 1-3/4 tons.

Steam from the boiler went into the bottom of the stills. The steam circulated through the chips, "cooking" them for about four hours. The resulting vapor went into a condensor.

The process ended with the oil dropping from the condensor into drums. Sassafras oil is heavier than water; therefore, in the drums it would sink to the bottom, and the water could be drained off the top.

After the distillation process, the oil was filtered into 52-gallon barrels and sent to dealers in Chicago or New York. These dealers would re-sell it for about two dollars a pound, and a barrel held about 500 pounds. The plant's output was eight to ten barrels a month.

In an interview with *The Courier-Journal*, the plant owner declined to reveal the amount the plant received for a barrel of oil. He would only say that it was enough to afford him a comfortable living.

It required thirty tons of wood to produce one barrel of oil. After the wood chips were cooked and the oil was removed, the chips were dried and fed back into the boiler as fuel to cook the next batch. It was a very efficient operation--there wasn't any waste to be disposed of.

That plant was destroyed by fire about 1955 and was never rebuilt.

A plant such as this, employing up to fifty men at times, was a god-send to Hardin County in the depths of the Great Depression. Men didn't make much money by today's standards. One man told me his father brought home about \$11 for a 44-hour week. He added that the work wasn't easy, but, in his words, "it helped raise a lot of families."

CAMPING AT HARDIN SPRINGS

(The following article appeared in the Hardin County Enterprise, an Elizabethtown newspaper, in August, 1903.)

The third annual encampment of the "Merry Makers" convened on Wednesday, August the fifth, at Hardin Springs, for a period of two weeks.

This club was organized some three years ago by Messrs. Virgil Harris, Frank Warren, Hugh E. Bland, Claude Brown, Charlie Gray and Henry Hardin, each gentleman having the privilege of inviting a young lady to dwell for the time being in "Angels' Retreat," the name so gallantly given by the men to the tent occupied by the girls. In the last two years there have been several additions and the jolly crowd which gathered in 1903 was composed of the following young people:

Logan English and Annie Eliza Robertson; Lillie Smith and Claude Brown; Hugh E. Bland and Elizabeth Holbert; Virgil Harris and Minnie Singleton; George Singleton and Nell Clarkson; John English and Frona Clarkson; Clint Pickerill and Joella Phillips; John Pickerill and Margaret Crume; Frank Warren and Net Kurtz; Charlie Gray and Amanda Harris; George Smith and Addie Hansbro; Archie H. Miller and Martha Poston. Dr. Gray and Miss Jennie Gaither chaperoned the crowd and in this capacity they both excel.

The trip down was most enjoyable, the wagonette carrying thirteen of the party while others followed in buggies.

The fact that our provisions and tent furniture did not arrive that day or that it poured in torrents was immaterial to us, and was looked upon by our jolly optimistic crowd as only part of the first epoch of good times.

We spent the night at the Hotel, and right here the campers wish to speak of the true Kentucky hospitality extended by Mr. Kessler and Mrs. Wieland, both of whom are connected with the hotel. Invitations were frequent from that quarter, and gladly we all availed ourselves of the opportunity of invading the large hall and corridor.

Thursday afternoon, the wagon having arrived, the tents were raised, and the interior arranged, and that night we were on the "old camp ground."

One acquainted with this country well remembers the beautiful scenery of Babel Rock, Telegraph Springs, and Moonshine Cliff. These places were visited by the campers, and each visit brought to us something new and beautiful which we had overlooked before. On returning from these tramps through the woods it was always with the keenest of appetites and "Uncle Dick" Cecil, who, with an iron spoon and butcher knife, ruled the culinary department, never disappointed us. Uncle Dick is one of those old-fashioned colored darkies, so few of whom

remain, and if some of our parental ancestors could eat some of his good corn cakes and bacon, and drink his coffee, they would live over again in their reminiscences of the days before the [Civil] war.

Rowing is one of the popular pasttimes, and especially at Blowing Cave, where Uncle Jimmie Royalty peddles fine watermelons, did the crowd gather and spend many pleasant hours listening to his quaint philosophy.

The bowling alley was equally attractive, and a number of exciting games between the hotel men and the campers were bowled. One may imagine when, on numerous occasions, our boys came out victorious, with what an ovation they were received at Camp. Mr. John Pickerill last week broke the record and bowled 155 on the alley; Mr. Virgil Harris 146; Claude Brown closely followed with a score of 145.

The track from the "Den" for about 100 yards was not in a good condition and only once or twice were the races indulged in. There were but few entries and the audiences were so small that they could not be seen.

The girls and boys were quite literary in camp this year and desired to improve themselves in this line and the cooking department. It is sufficient to say that we can all make "good gravy."

The last is always the best, and this outing of the "Merry Makers" was voted by a majority of the members as the most enjoyable. Everyone spoke in enthusiastic terms of the many pleasant hours spent at camp, and as an inhabitant of "Angels' Retreat" the writer voices the sentiment of the girls when it is said that never were they so royally treated or their wants and desires so complied with as by the men of "Camp Merry Makers."

M. C. P.

PICKLE FACTORY

AT WEST POINT

The Mirror, a newspaper formerly published in Elizabethtown, printed the following news item in its issue of July 4, 1912. If you know any further details of this endeavor, please let us hear from you:

The pickle factory at West Point which is in process of erection will be ready for operation within a short time. The machinery has arrived and is ready to be installed. The factory will have 20 vats which will have a capacity of 2,000 gallons each. The factory will be patronized by farmers from Meade, Hardin and Bullitt counties and also by Indiana, and the output will be a vast amount.

JOHN SWANK OF HARDIN COUNTY, KENTUCKY

John Swank and Rosannah Swank, his wife, were among the first settlers of Hardin County, coming to the county in 1780 with the colony of Samuel Haycraft, Jacob Vanmeter, and others.

The Swanks lived in a fort of their own two miles northeast of Elizabethtown. In 1793, John and Rosannah, while on a visit to Bardstown, were waylaid and attacked by the Indians. Both horses were shot, and Mrs. Swank was wounded in the arm. In attempting to make their escape, after running a short distance, Mrs. Swank's horse fell dead under her. She had a new saddle which she removed from the dead horse and hung in a tree. Swank's horse, though shot, was yet able to travel. He dismounted and put his wife on his horse and fled on foot to a cave on the old Cofer farm two miles from his fort. His dog betrayed him by barking at the pursuing Indians, and he was pierced by nineteen bullets and killed instantly.

Tradition says Swank was sitting upright with his back against the projecting rocks, and after many bullets were fired into his body, it remained upright. The Indians became frightened and fled, thinking he was a spirit.

Mrs. Swank fled on her husband's wounded horse until he fell, and then escaped on foot to Pairpoints Mill on the Rolling Fork. She was wearing a new heavy linsey dress, which she pulled off as she ran. In pioneer days pins were scarce, and she very carefully stuck those she

removed in an even row in the bosom of her dress.

In the year 1794, Rosannah Swank administered upon the estate of her deceased husband. She lived many years, dying after 1843, a skillful and popular woman ministering to the needs of the sick and suffering.

John Swank served in the Revolutionary War in Capt. John Vertrees' company. Others serving in that company, in addition to Vertrees and Swank, who later settled in Hardin County, include Daniel Linder, Edward Rawlings, Andrew Reed, and Joseph Kirkpatrick.

John Swank received three tracts of land in Kentucky County, Virginia, on the north fork of Buffalo Creek 1780 and 1781. Two tracts were withdrawn, and a tract of 200 acres was surveyed for him in Severns Valley Aug. 8, 1781, about two miles from Cofer's Cave, near which he met his death. This land remained in the hands of some of his descendants for many years.

John Swank's Revolutionary War service has been accepted by the National Society, Daughters of the American Revolution. Helen McMurtry Crossfield, National Number 368987, joined on this line.

It is believed that John and Rosannah Swank were married ca. 1770 somewhere in what they thought was the Colony of Pennsylvania, possibly in what was later Fayette County. Their son, Jacob Swank, said he was born in Pennsylvania. They unquestionably lived near Berkeley County, Virginia (now West Virginia), since they were a part of the Vanmeter party coming to Kentucky about 1780.

Children of John and Rosannah Swank were:

1. Hannah, b. 1773, md. Jonas Gray.
2. John Swank, Jr., b. ca. 1775, md. Nancy Harrison.
3. Jacob, b. 1776, md. Elizabeth Vanmeter.
4. Elizabeth, b. ca. 1777, md. William Edlin.
5. David, b. 1780, md. Elizabeth Westfall.
6. Susannah, b. ca. 1785, md. John Roll.
7. Rosannah, b. ca. 1787, md. Samuel Walls.
(Possibly Susannah and Rosannah were twins.)
8. Joseph, b. 1788, md. Letitia Vanmeter.

Hardin County Will Book A, pp. 3-5, show the inventory and appraisal of the personal estate of John Swank, which was made on 12 August 1794, by Thomas Helm, Jacob Rhoads and John Vertrees. Value 142 pounds, 12 shillings.

(Sources: Who Was Who in Hardin County; personal records)

A NOVEL BALL GAME

Elizabethtown is to witness a novel game of ball next Friday, when a club, which has named itself the "Has Beens" tackles the regular club. Mr. H. L. James is the Captain of the "Has Beens" as he has gotten together a nine of glass arms and spavin joints to go up against the real thing. They have got the star pitcher of Hart County J. D. Craddock to do their twirling and they are relying on his ability to pitch great ball as a basis of victory. The "Has Beens" will muster the following nine: Horace Hays, President First National Bank; Marvin Barnes, Asst. Postmaster; W. H. Robertson, Cashier First National Bank; J. R. Layman, Commonwealth's Attorney; Louis Goldnamer, Dry Goods Merchant; F. G. Corley, County Clerk; Robert Cates, Miller; H. L. James, Attorney at Law; Gabe Meadors, Drug Clerk; and J. D. Craddock, the whole push. It will be worth coming miles to see and insurance underwriters should be on hands to issue accident policies if they are willing to take the risks.

(From *The Elizabethtown News*, July 15, 1904)

ELIZABETHTOWN BOARD OF TRUSTEES MINUTES, 1832, CONCLUDED

October 13th 1832

At a meeting of the Board of Trustees of Elizabeth Town on 13th October 1832

Present Benjamin Tobin, John Morris, Wm. English, and Daniel K. Haycraft Trustees

Be it ordained, that no person shall be permitted to raise hogs running at large within the limits of this Town. Any person violating this ordinance shall for every Offence be subject to a fine of not less than two dollars nor more than five dollars. And for every week they are permitted to run at large or any part of a week shall constitute a new offence and be subject to a like penalty

Any person feeding hogs in the Streets, Alleys or public square of this Town shall for each offence be subject to a fine of not less than two dollars nor more than five dollars

No person shall be permitted to feed hogs in enclosed lots of this Town in such numbers as to produce a stench to the Annoyance of the Citizens under a penalty of not less than two nor more than five dollars for each Offence. The nuisance to be adjudged of upon proof before a justice of the peace

All forfeitures and fines under the foregoing ordinances to be recovered by warrant before a justice of the peace in the name of the Trustees and to be applied to keeping the streets in order. The above ordinances to take effect from and after the 16th instant and a copy thereof to be posted at the Court House door

Ordered that the board adjourn

Ben Tobin

ELIZABETHTOWN BOARD OF TRUSTEES MINUTES, 1833

February 23rd 1833

At a meeting of the Board of Trustees of Elizabeth Town on 23rd February 1833

Present Daniel K. Haycraft, Joseph B. Prunty, and Benjamin Tobin

Whereas a certain Mr. McLevin is about to conjure and perform feats of strange activity in this town for profit. It is ordered that he pay to the clerk of this board the sum of Two dollars.

Ordered that the board adjourn

Ben Tobin

April 5th 1833

At a meeting of the board of Trustees of Elizabeth Town April 5th 1833--

Present Benjamin Tobin, Daniel K. Haycraft, and Joseph B. Prunty---

Whereas the Market House being Torn down and the materials being likely to go to waste It is therefore ordered that the same be sold on Saturday the 6th of this month by Daniel K. Hayacraft to the highest bidder for cash in the hand and that the purchaser be bound to remove the said materials by the 20th of this month.

Ordered that the Board adjourn

Ben Tobin

May 7th 1833

At a meeting of the Board of Trustees of Elizabeth Town May 7th 1833

Present James Crutcher, Sen., Benjamin Tobin, John Morris, and Daniel K. Haycraft

Ordered that Daniel K. Haycraft be appointed Overseer of the streets of this town until the 1st day of August next

Ordered that a tax be levied on each white male inhabitant over 21 years of twenty five cents and also freeholders of this town---

Ordered that Thomas Parcels be appointed Town Collector and Ordered that the Clerk of this board furnish said Parcels with a list of the names of the inhabitants and also freeholders of this town over 21 years---

Ordered that Daniel K. Haycraft be appointed Treasurer of this board

Ordered that this board adjourn

Ben Tobin

May 16th 1833

At a meeting of the Board of Trustees of Elizabeth Town on the 16th day of May 1833

Present James Crutcher, John Morris, and Benjamin Tobin

Whereas a certain Mr. Glaus is about to perform in Elizabeth Town a variety of feats and slight of Hand &c

It is therefore Ordered that he be taxed the sum of Two Dollars for the first performance and the sum of One Dollar for every performance thereafter and Ordered that he pay the same to Stephen W. D. Stone the Clerk of this board.

Ordered that the Board adjourn

Ben Tobin

Monday August 5th 1833

In pursuance to an act of assembly directing Elections to be held in the several county towns of this State for the purpose of Electing five trustees in Each Town on the first Monday in August Annually, I caused an Election to be held at the Court House in Elizabeth Town on Monday the 5th day of August 1833 for the purpose aforesaid and caused to be elected by the qualified voters of said Town the following persons to wit: H. G. Wintersmith, John Morris, John Y. Hill, Temple Poston, and Samuel Haycraft, Trustees

Given under my hand this 5th day of August 1833

Stephen W. D. Stone Clk

August 26th 1833

At a meeting of the Board of Trustees of Elizabeth Town on the 26th day of August 1833

Present John Morris, Temple Poston, Samuel Haycraft, and John Y. Hill, and H. G. Wintersmith, Trustees

The Trustees being sworn, Horatio G. Wintersmith is appointed Chairman.

There being no business before the board It is ordered that the same adjourn

H. G. Wintersmith

COUNTY COURT ORDER BOOK A HARDIN COUNTY, KENTUCKY, continued

DECEMBER TERM 1802

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At a County Court begun and held for Hardin County at the Courthouse in Elizabeth Town on Monday the 27th day of December 1802.

Present Isom Enlows, George Bell and Daniel Vittito Esquires

Ordered that William McClure be appointed Constable in this County in the room of Conrod Custard. Upon his entering into bond & taking the oath required by law. Whereupon the said William McClure with David McClure his security entered into bond & took the oath required by law.

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The Court doth lay off William McClure's District as Constable, as follows, To wit: Beginning at the mouth of middle Creek & running out to include Lucas's Grove, also all the waters of Barren Run & all the waters of the Big South fork, thence to include all the waters of NoLinn opposite to the head of Middle Creek, thence across to Middle Creek & down the same to the beginning.

For reasons adduced to the Court, It is ordered that Isaac Larue be & he is hereby discontinued as surveyor of the road leading from Robert Hodgen's mill to Andrew Rushes, and that William Anderson be and he is hereby appointed surveyor of said road and that all the hands that were to assist said Larue do assist him in opening & keeping the same in repair.

Ordered that George Bell & John W. Holt, Gentlemen be & they are hereby appointed to settle with Robert Hodgen late sheriff of said county for the year 1801 & make report thereof to the next Court.

Ordered that the same do examine the Clerks & Surveyors Office of this County & make report thereof to the next Court.

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Hearing on Miller vs. Kesinger continued, & Deft to pay costs of continuance.

Ordered that Samuel Duree be & he is hereby appointed to survey of the road leading from Elizabeth Town to Jacob Vanmeters plantation in the room of Armistead Churchill & that all the hands that assisted said Churchill do assist him in keeping the same in repair.

Philip Read Sheriff of this County, with Benjamin Helm & John Sneed his securities entered into & acknowledged bond in the Penalty of L400.74 with condition as the law directs for the collection of the county for the year 1802

Present David Morrison, esqr.

Crutcher vs. Bush dismissed for want of prosecution

Ordered that Court be adjourned till Court in course.

/s/ Isom Enlows

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January Term 1803

At a County Court began & held for Hardin County, at the Courthouse thereof on Monday the 17th day of January 1803.

Present Stephen Rawlings, George Bell & Asa Coombes, Esquires.

On the motion of Elizabeth Vertrees, the Court doth appoint her Guardian of Daniel McNeil, Rebecca McNeil & Rachel McNeil, Infant orphans of Thomas McNeil, Deceased & to Charles Vertrees, Infant orphan of John Vertrees Deceased, she having entered into & acknowledged bond in the Penalty of \$500, conditioned as the law directs.

On motion of Jacob Vanmeter license is granted him to keep a Tavern at his Present Dwelling house in this County for the Term of one year from this Date, and to the next County Court thereafter, he having given bond as the law requires with George Wisehart his security.

On the Motion of Elizabeth Carr & David Carr who made Oath according to Law, administration of the estate of John Carr Deceased is granted them, they having given bond with Alexander Lashly & Christopher Bush their securities in the penalty of \$300 Dollars conditioned as the law directs.

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On the motion of Daniel Harris (free Negro) who claimed a certificate for a settlement of two hundred acres at the state Price, on account of having settled on the same, satisfactory proof being made to the land, they are of opinion that the said Daniel is intitled to a certificate for two hundred acres of land lying in Hardin County beginning on the line of Banks and Barbours 2nd 50,000 acre survey, which begins at two hickories & being a south east corner of the same beginning at a large white oak in said line, running south forty five east eighty poles also North forty five, west fifty poles, thence south forty five, West two hundred poles, thence south forty five, East so far that a line at right angles will include two hundred acres to intersect Banks & Barbours survey thence with the same North forty five, west with Banks & Barbours line to the Beginning, and that a certificate issue accordingly.

Ordered that Nicholas Miller, George Howard & Jacob Enlow being first sworn before a magistrate of this County, do appraise in current money the slaves, if any, and personal estate of John Carr deceased & return the appraisement thereof to the next Court.

The Court doth appoint John Kennedy Commissioner of the Revenue Tax for this County, for the present year, he having given bond as the law directs with Charles Helm his security.

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Ordered that the Sheriff of this County do immediately hire to the highest bidder a Negro man named Pemberton, who was committed to Jail of this County as a runaway for the Term of nine months from this Date, and it is further ordered that the person who may hire him shall furnish him with sufficient cloathing during that period.

Miller vs. Kesinger, verdt Confirmed

Ordered that Court be adjourned till Tomorrow at 12 O'Clock.

/s/ Step. Rawlings

Tuesday January the 18th 1803. The Court met according to adjournment. Present the same Justices as on yesterday.

The last will and Testament of John Vertrees, deceased, was produced in Court and proved by the Oaths of Henry Ewin & Charles Helm subscribing witnesses thereto, and was ordered to be Recorded.

Ordered that Court be adjourned till Court in course.

/s/ Step. Rawlings

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JAMES WILSONS EXAMINATION

At a County Court called and held for Hardin County, at the Courthouse in Elizabeth Town on Tuesday the first day of February 1803 for the examination of James Wilson charged with having on the 25th day of January last gave Archabald McDonald of said County, one and one quarter box Counterfeit Spanish Mill dollars, and requested him the said Archabald to pass the said Counterfeit money for him the said James Wilson.

Present Stephen Rawlings, Thomas McIntire, Isom Enlows & George Bell esquires.

The said James Wilson was set to the barr in the custody of the Sheriff, and it being demanded of him whether he was Guilty of the crime aforesaid or not, sayed he is in no wise thereof guilty, whereupon Archabald McDonald was introduced as a witness by the Commonwealths attorney who was objected to as an incompetent witness by the counsil for the prisoner in consequence of his being interested of which opinion was the court, and nothing further appearing against him it is ordered that he be discharged from his imprisonment.

Ordered that the Court be adjourned.

/s/ Step. Rawlings

ANNOUNCEMENT OF NEXT MEETING

The Hardin County Historical Society will meet Monday, October 27, 1997, at 6:30 P.M. at the Brown-Pusey House, 128 N. Main Street, Elizabethtown.

In keeping with Halloween, the program will be "Kentucky Ghosts." Dr. Lynwood Montell, Emeritus Professor of Folk Studies, Western Kentucky University, will be the speaker. In his very popular talk, Dr. Montell discusses beliefs that portend death, tells ghost stories illustrating the reasons for ghostly visitations, and looks at recent changes in attitudes toward ghosts. This program is funded in part by the Kentucky Humanities Council and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Officers for 1998 will be elected. The slate presented by the Nominating Committee is Jim Weise, President (two-year term); Larry Hall, First Vice President (one-year unexpired term of Jim Weise, resigned); Mary Jo Jones, Second Vice President (two-year term). Nominations may be made from the floor.

Dinner will be catered by the Stone Hearth Restaurant.

MENU: Honey glazed ham, green beans, au gratin potatoes, cranberry nut gelatin salad; rolls; coffee, tea.

PRICE: \$6.25.

Telephone Jack Kunnecke (737-5756) by October 25th for dinner reservations.

HARDIN COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
P.O. BOX 381
ELIZABETHTOWN, KY 42702