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Michael L. Bell, compiler

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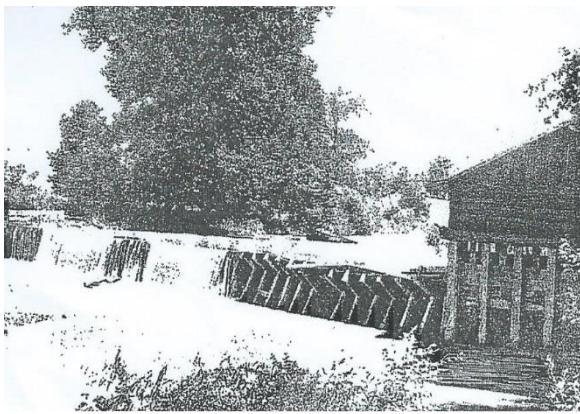
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Winter 2018

HODGENVILLE: A HARDIN COUNTY TOWN FROM 1818-1843

By Sherrill Williams and Samantha Bell

On February 9, 2018, the city of Hodgenville—the seat of government for LaRue



Robert Hodgen (1742-1810) built Hodgen's Mill and dam at this site in 1789. Grist mills continued to be operated at this site (near "Gum Spring") until 1920, when the last, "Lynn Mills," ceased operations. Possibly, the structure at the right in this photo was part of Hodgen's original building.

(Photo from the Hardin County Historian John Lay)

County since 1843—will celebrate its' 200th birthday, having been officially established by Hardin County Court on February 9, 1818. The court's approval had been granted in response to a request and petition filed on February 7th by Isaac, John and Sarah LaRue Hodgen, sons and wife of Robert Hodgen, deceased, an early settler (1784) at Philip Phillips' Fort, and owner of the property on which the newly chartered town would be platted.

Robert Hodgen (1742-1810), the man for whom the city would be named, was born near Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, probably to a former English sea captain named John Hodgen and Anna Stanaloud Hodgen, his Dutch wife.

Robert would first marry Susannah Adkins and by her have four children—Robert (Jr.),

Susannah, Joseph (killed by Indians while serving with Col. William Oldham's Kentucky Militia during General St. Clair's 1791 campaign), and William. Whether Robert moved his family to the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia before or after Susannah's death (bet. 1772-1776) is unclear, but he would marry, second, Sarah LaRue (ca.1755-1825), a daughter of Isaac and Phebe Carmen LaRue of the Long Marsh community of Frederick (now Clarke) County, Virginia.

Between the years 1776-1800, Robert and Sarah Hodgen would have twelve children—Margaret, Phebe, Isaac (1771-1826), Sarah, John (1785-1850), Rebecca, Elizabeth, Mary, Samuel, Jacob, James and Jabez. Of these children, the last six listed were born on the Hodgen plantation along the Nolin in what would become Hardin County in 1792. Prior to the formation of Hardin County this area was part of Nelson County.

In October of 1784, Robert Hodgen, with family and servants, boarded a flatboat near Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, this in preparation for a six-hundred-mile journey down river to the Falls of the Ohio near the present site of Louisville. Also, along on this journey was Sarah

Hodgen's brother and sister-in-law, John and Mary Brooks LaRue, and their family and servants. Too, there was aboard Captain (later General) John Thomas and his wife, Susannah Hodgen Thomas, the oldest daughter of Robert Hodgen and his first wife, Susannah Adkins Hodgen. With this large number of people, their livestock, house-hold and farming utensils, etc., there were probably two or more flatboats used on this journey. Due to the Ohio's low water level at this time, the Hodgen/LaRue journey, according to former LaRue County historian James LaRue, Jr., took seven weeks... about five weeks longer than normal.



This ca. 1899 photo was taken from present-day North Lincoln Boulevard where it intersects with East Water Street in Hodgenville. In the far background, center, stands the house built and lived in by Robert Hodgen and his family. At right is the Ford (formerly Tarpley) Hotel.

(Photo from the Carl Howell, Jr., collection)

After days of preparation at the Falls, the Hodgens, LaRues and Thomases journeyed sixty miles inland, following old buffalo paths to near the present site of Boston in Nelson County, and then from there on to the fort Philip Phillips had constructed in or about 1781. John LaRue (and perhaps Robert Hodgen) had ventured to this region prior, both men claiming vast amounts of land. Hodgen's claims totaled at least 10,000 acres lying "north of the Green River."

Following several months inside the confines of Phillips' Fort, Hodgen, with family and slaves, would move one and one-half mile south to land he had claimed along the south bank of the north fork of Nolynn (Nolin) Creek. This move was likely in early to mid-1785, and the site he chose for his residence would later serve as the location for the LaRue County Water Works on East Water Street.

Along with constructing a house, servant quarters and whatever barns and outbuildings were needed for plantation management, Hodgen, on December 9, 1788, gained approval from Nelson County Court to construct a grist mill on his north fork property. Here, very near his residence overlooking the "Gum Spring," he constructed a mill and dam, and in 1789 "Hodgen's Mill" was opened for business. Along with his grist mill, Hodgen also operate a saw mill.

Robert Hodgen's plantation would include all of the land that would eventually become the downtown and public square portion of Hodgenville, as well as some surrounding acreage—a total of 27.5 acres donated, surveyed and platted for town lots in 1818, eight years after his February 1810 death. Possibly, Robert Hodgen had plans for a town on his property before his death, but it would be his wife and children who would be responsible for eventually seeing it accomplished.

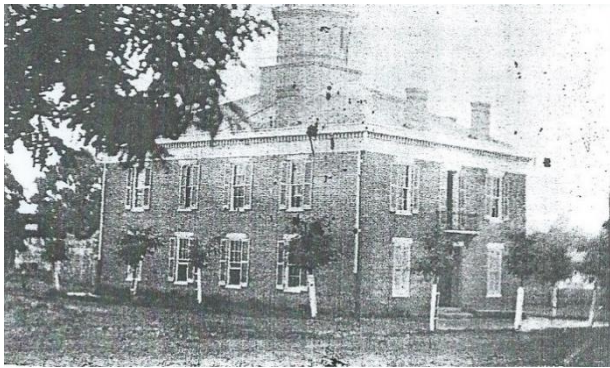
Sarah LaRue Hodgen would outlive her husband by fifteen years or so, and both she and Robert were buried in the cemetery at Nolynn Baptist Church (constituted in 1803) located four miles downstream from their north fork plantation. A beautiful stained-glass window in the present brick church building (built by carpenter W. T. Cotton for \$2,198.13 in 1895 after fire destroyed the one built in 1803) commemorates Robert Hodgen's role in the early settlement of the Nolin community.

At the time of the establishment of Hodgenville there was probably no buildings on the Hodgen property other than those previously mentioned. However, Robert Hodgen had been

licensed to operate an “ordinary” (or tavern) by the Hardin County Court in January 1797. Whether he operated this in his home or had a separate building for this tavern is not known. It is interesting to note that on August 19th of that same year, Hodgen’s “ordinary” is said to have entertained the exiled French King Louis Phillipe and his “Royal” brothers who were traveling from Nashville to Louisville. They had fled France during the revolution that would eventually give rise to Napoleon Bonaparte.

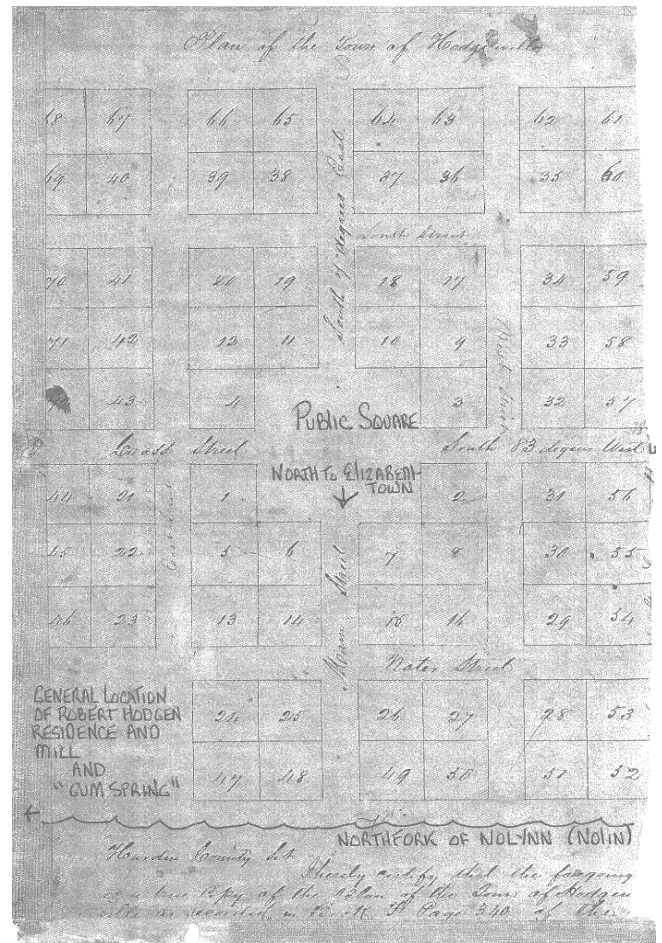
With the tavern and other business enterprises, “Hodgen’s Mill,” no doubt, had become a rural gathering and social center for the farmers and settlers scattered up and down the north fork and its’ branches. And this activity wouldn’t end with Robert’s death in 1810. Hodgen’s will, dated February 1, 1810, provided that his wife Sarah would receive “the plantation where I now live, together with gristmill.” Sarah remained on the Hodgen plantation until her death, and with the help of her son John (who lived with his widowed mother in the house built by Robert), continued operating the mill. Just how long the Hodgens were involved with the

mill operation is unclear, but there would be a functioning mill on this site until 1920 when “Lynn Mills” (Lynn Milling Company) closed its doors.



This photo is of LaRue County’s first courthouse. It served as such from 1844 until 1966, when it was demolished. Confederate Guerrillas led by William Hughes of Nelson County set it ablaze in Feb. 1865, but the walls survived the fire and the interior was restored.

Austin Gollaher, a childhood friend of Abraham Lincoln when the two were young boys in the Knob Creek community, at an 1891 picnic held for Buffalo school children at the site of Lincoln’s birth, told the children of visits to Hodgen’s Mill with his father, and in company with Abraham and his father, Thomas Lincoln. Bessie Merrifield, a Buffalo school student who heard Gollaher speak that day in ’91, remembered some of his stories, and later, in 1966, wrote that Gollaher told the crowd; “Occasionally we went with our fathers to the grist mill of John Hodgen, which was the present site of the town of Hodgenville.” Continuing, he told that “John Hodgen lived with his widowed mother, Sarah Hodgen, near the mill. She was a kindly disposed woman and would often take us to her house and make us an ‘ash cake.’” After



1818 PLAT FOR TOWN OF HODGENVILLE, HARDIN COUNTY

describing how ash cakes were made, Gollaher continued; “I can see Abe now in my memory, as he sat and ate his cake, smiling and wriggling his toes in delight, while Mrs. Hodgen looked on graciously and kindly, in her motherly way.”

With the establishment of Hodgenville on the 27.5 acres set aside by the Hodgen family, lots were surveyed and made available for sale by the town’s first board of trustees—one comprised of Joseph Kirkpatrick, Sr., William Brown, William Cessna, Samuel Hodgen (son of Robert), and Abraham Enlow. Apparently, sales of town lots were slow in developing, however, as Hardin County Deed Book 1 would seem to indicate the first lot was not sold until May 21, 1822, when James LaRue purchased Lot #15 for \$132.00. (This James LaRue was probably a nephew of pioneer John LaRue, and a son of Jacob and Mary Frost LaRue.)

In 1823, lots were sold to Samuel Smith (Lot #14); Conrad Walters (Lot #49); James Castleman (Lot #29); and Roseanna Wilson (Lot #42). On December 3, 1827 (four days prior to the establishment of Hodgenville’s first post office on December 7th), Lots #13, 14, 23, 24, 47 and 50 were sold to John Hodgen, the son of Robert, who, with brother Isaac and his mother Sarah, had been instrumental in the town’s formation nine years earlier. Among other early purchasers was Jacob Keith (Lots #7 and 44), a son of William and Elizabeth LaRue Keith and the husband of Rebecca Hodgen Keith (a daughter of Robert and Sarah LaRue Hodgen). (After Jacob Keith’s death, Rebecca Hodgen Keith married John Thomas, whose first wife, Susannah Hodgen Thomas, was a half-sister of Rebecca.)

It cannot be said that Hodgenville grew quickly, either in terms of population or business activity. However, by the year 1840 “great agitation” for the formation of a new county was building, as many in this southeastern corner of Hardin County felt the distance to the courthouse in Elizabethtown was too great, and that the area’s population had increased enough to make a break from Hardin County feasible. In terms of population, the first LaRue County Census (in 1850) counted 5,859 residents, with 246 of this number residing within the boundaries of Hodgenville.

Judge Otis M. Mather (1868-1950), prominent LaRue County attorney, Georgetown University graduate, and local historian and genealogist of considerable note, in his “Mather Papers,” speculated that by the time Hodgenville was deemed worthy enough to have a U.S. Post Office in 1827, there were “probably less than a dozen buildings in the village,” among these “Hodgen’s Mill, three or four dwellings, and one or two stores and shops and possibly a tannery.”

On March 4, 1843, nearly twenty-five years after the Hardin County Court created the town of Hodgenville, the legislature of Kentucky passed an act creating the new county of LaRue. Three weeks later, on March 25th, the first LaRue County Court met at the “Presbyterian Meeting House” in Hodgenville. Today, the LaRue County Public Library is located at this site. By this time, according to Judge Mather, Hodgenville could probably count twenty-four to thirty residences, a Baptist and Presbyterian church, a school house, six to twelve store buildings, and a brick hotel. In 1814, a new two-story brick courthouse—the county’s first and one of only two to date—was constructed on the public square. Stephen W. Stone, LaRue’s first county clerk, made considerable contributions for the courthouse’s funding. This building would serve the county as such until 1966 when, despite considerable public opposition, the building was demolished. Today, a statue of Abraham Lincoln as a young lad is located on this site.

With the formation of LaRue County in 1843, Hardin County's role in the development and governing of Hodgenville had come to an end. But the shared experiences, history and family ties (including the Lincolns) between the two counties had formed a bond that, at least in some ways, has never be completely severed.

In celebration on Hodgenville's 200th birthday, the Lincoln Museum has published and will be releasing a new book entitled HODGENVILLE: TWO HUNDRED YEARS IN LINCOLN'S BIRTHPLACE. The book will be available in early 2018, and can be ordered in either hardback or softback form by contacting the Lincoln Museum. Order forms are also available at the Hardin Country History Museum.

MENU for our January 29th meeting at NOLIN RECC will be: chili, vegetable soup, corn muffins, salad, and desserts provided by Heartland Catering. Cost of the meal is \$10.00.

**MEMBERSHIP
RENEWAL**
Annual Dues

It is time to renew your **dues!** **\$15.00** and you can bring them to the meeting or mail them to the Society at
HARDIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY
P. O. BOX 381
ELIZABETHTOWN, KENTUCKY 42702

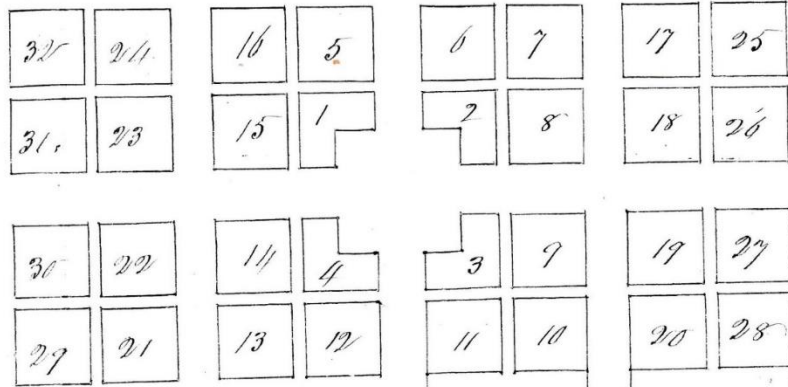
BURLINGTON: A HARDIN COUNTY TOWN THAT NEVER WAS

About four miles south of Hodgen's Mill, on February 9, 1818, the Hardin County Court approved the establishment of a new town to be called "Burlington." This town was to be located near a mill located on the south fork of the Nolin, one that George Close had built and operated after gaining approval from Nelson County Court in 1788. Later, George Close's son, John Close would operate this mill. Filing the 1818 petition before the Hardin County Court was John Welsh, a Hardin County resident who had, on July 1, 1816, purchased 100 acres (including the mill site) from the previous owner, Alexander Merrifield.

Wether it was coincidence or planned is unknown, but on the same day Welsh was granted approval for the town of Burlington, Isaac, John and Sarah Hodgen, sons and wife of Robert Hodgen, deceased, were granted approval for a town on their property near Hodgen's Mill about four miles to the north. The Hodgens' proposed town was to be called Hodgenville. Both Welsh and the Hodgens had surveyed and platted their land, with plans to sell town lots through their respective Board of Trustees.

Since the opening of George Close's Mill in 1789, a community had developed around the mill site, one, that by 1818, included a "considerable tavern" (operated by the previously mentioned Merrifield), a blacksmith shop, a storehouse, a ball-battery (?), a large distillery and a "race path" that apparently was in frequent use. The fact that one-half-mile to the north of this mill and small village, from about 1808-1812, Thomas and Nancy Hanks Lincoln had owned and resided on the "Cave Spring" farm (a.k.a. "Sinking Spring" farm), might indicate that this area wasn't as isolated and remote as Lincoln researchers and scholars would later describe.

Burlington



1818
March 23rd
Ex 24
Settled
Verdict
of John
Welsh

The Town of Burlington is laid off on the following plan viz. The main street running N 50 E. 50 W is sixty feet in width - the other cross streets are fifty feet in width - the other streets fifteen feet in width. The in lots each contain a square measure except number 1, 2 & 3 and 4 which each contain three square acres. The out lots each contain five acres.

Field Notes
Lot #1 Beginning at a post at the corner of the public square thence S 10 E 4 1/2 poles thence S 50 W 4 poles thence N 40 W 9 poles thence S 50 E 9 poles thence S 10 E 4 1/2 poles thence S 50 W 4 poles to the beginning - Lot #2 Beginning at a post at the corner of the public square thence S 50 W 4 poles thence N 40 W 4 poles thence S 10 E 9 poles thence S 50 W 4 poles thence N 10 E 1/2 poles to the beginning - Lot #3 Beginning at a post at the corner of the public square thence N 40 W 4 poles thence S 50 E 4 1/2 poles thence S 10 E 9 poles thence S 50 W 4 poles thence N 10 E 1/2 poles thence S 50 W 4 poles to the beginning.

Original plat of Burlington February 1818

As previously mentioned, the story of Burlington began on July 1, 1816, when John Welsh purchased from Alexander Merrifield, one hundred acres of land, including the mill site formally owned by John Close. (This site, as shown on the 1899 LaRue County Farmhouse map copyrighted by Charles Williams and C. W. Barnes, was likely where Read's Mill is shown on the south fork of Nolin). Welsh, at the time of his 100-acre purchase, also purchased from Merrifield 250 addition acres adjoining the one-hundred-acre track—these 250 acres lying adjacent to the Sinking Spring farm where the Lincolns had lived before their 1812 move to their Knob Creek farm.

Several weeks prior to the Hodgens filing their petition to Hardin County Court for the founding of Hodgenville, John Welsh had employed a man named Findley to survey and lay off lots for the town of Burlington. Whether or not Welsh knew of the Hodgens' plans to petition for their town is unclear, but sometime later, in a deposition involving a lawsuit between John Welsh and Alexander Merrifield, lot purchaser James

Redman claimed that Welsh "thought he had the first right" but that he was unsure as to whether or not Welsh was angry with the Hodgens.

In approving the establishment of Burlington on February 9, 1818, Hardin County Court recorded: "On motion of John Welsh a town is established on his land in this county to be called and known by the name of Burlington, agreeable to the plan this day produced in court by the said John Welsh which is ordered to be recorded. The said John Welsh, entered into and acknowledged his bond in the penalty of one thousand dollars conditioned as the law directs with John H Geoghegan and Robert McLure his securities. And it is further ordered that Robert McLure, Gabriel Kirkpatrick, Benjamin Wright, Adin Coombs and John Ashcraft and they are hereby appointed trustees in and for said town of Burlington."

Following the February approval from Hardin County Court, Welsh, in March of that same year,

arranged an auction sale of town lots. The auctioneer was Robert McLure, a Burlington trustee. McLure, in a later deposition, stated that he was “the crier of the lots sold in Burlington,” and then further testified that twenty-four or more lots were sold, and that the amount of the purchases came to about twenty-four hundred dollars.

Apparently, the lawsuit mentioned previously had developed over accusations of fraud involving the original transaction between Merrifield and Welsh, with John Welsh as the plaintiff and Alexander Merrifield as the defendant. Although the outcome of this lawsuit is unknown to this writer (a trip to Frankfort would tell more), the results were likely a major cause for the failure of Burlington to materialize. Too, about this same time, the roadbed of the old pioneer trail known as the “Cumberland Road” was redirected away from the Burlington community and closer to Hodgenville. As a result, Hodgenville was given a trading advantage over its rival, Burlington.



President's Message. . . . January, 2018

Greetings and Happy New Year fellow historians. As we turn the page and begin planning for this year's programs, I want to take a moment and give you a short recap of what we accomplished in 2017. We are a small group but we made some significant contributions to the community last year. .

- A) Reprinted McClure's "Two Centuries in Elizabethtown and Hardin County"
- B) Reprinted McMurtry's "Kentucky Lincolns on Mill Creek"
- B) Installed two new interpretative markers and restored two existing markers
- C) Compiled narrative and designed signage for the Walker Memorial Park. Kenny Tabb Represented the Society at the dedication.
- D) Reinstated our tax and 501©3 status with KY and IRS
- E) Completed independent audit on financial records (and I am pleased to report that all is in order)

Although we were not able to establish a historical program at the Lincoln Heritage House this year, we will continue to work with the City to make that a reality in 2018, as restoration on the cabin is nearing completion.

We added several new members and we're working on updating the membership/ mailing list so everyone receives the Bits & Pieces. If you're not getting it, check with Jon Anderson to see if your dues are paid up. You can call him at 270-769-1410.

I want to extend my sincere thanks to the outgoing officers, Anita Goodin, Susan McCrobie, Charlie Lanz and our secretary of 25+ years, Charlie Skees. I cannot thank you enough for your many contributions to the society. I hope you will continue to support the group through your membership and regular attendance at the meetings. All of us are grateful for your service.

Now I want to welcome our new officers, First Vice, Josh Cooper, Secretary, Judge Kelly Easton, Treasurer, Jon Anderson, and Bits & Pieces editor, Bro. Mike Bell. I am honored to serve as your president for another term and we will work hard to deserve the confidence you have placed in us. We've already been talking and I can tell you to expect new and exciting speakers in the year ahead. I am excited about the opportunities to work with all of you and look forward to your support as we increase the value of the Historical Society to our community.

Twylane Van Lahr

Program on the 29th will be concerning Fort Duffield. Please note a portion of an article by James T. R. Jones: Fort Duffield, the largest earthen work Civil War fortress in Kentucky, overlooks West Point, Kentucky, at the border of Jefferson County (home of Louisville) and Hardin County, at the confluence of the Salt and Ohio Rivers. This particular spot was important in the early days of the Civil War for a number of reasons. First, it commanded the Louisville-Nashville Turnpike, which was a potential invasion route for attacking Southern armies. Second, West Point, which was blessed with active river traffic, was a major supply depot for the Union Army based there (which eventually became the Army of the Cumberland) which needed protection; goods would go by river to West Point and then by wagon to the intended recipient (eventually to Major General Buell as far south as southern Tennessee). Third, the Salt River was the last natural barrier to anyone trying to attack Louisville from the west. Thus, a fort over West Point was a high priority. Brigadier General Robert Anderson, the Union officer who surrendered Fort Sumter to Confederate Brigadier General P. G. T. Beauregard in April, 1861, and was then sent to command Union forces around Louisville, started construction of fortifications around West Point in September, 1861. Brigadier General Anderson had to step down due to poor health and was replaced as commander of the Department of the Cumberland by Brigadier General William Tecumseh Sherman. Brigadier General Sherman ordered that the fort, that became known as Fort Duffield, be built.

Construction began in early November, 1861, with much of the work being done by the men of the Ninth Michigan Infantry Regiment commanded by Colonel William Duffield (for whose father, George Duffield, a Michigan clergyman, the fort was named). By March, 1862, the fort was finished and the men of the Ninth moved further south. It was hard work, as the men dug up earth and piled it to make the high walls which characterize Fort Duffield. All trees were cleared out for a one-mile radius around the fort, leaving a clear field of fire for the garrison and its artillery (as many as ten guns). It was an impregnable position, which helps explain why it was never challenged (Brigadier General John Hunt Morgan went west and crossed the Ohio River at Brandenburg; General Braxton Bragg's army turned east to Perryville).

HARDIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY
P. O. BOX 381
ELIZABETHTOWN, KENTUCKY 42702
Meeting January 29
Nolin RECC

January 29th Meeting
NOLIN RECC
Dinner 6:30
Program 7:00

