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# Bits and Pieces

**OF HARDIN COUNTY HISTORY**

[www.hardinkyhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.hardinkyhistoricalsociety.org)

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## Stagecoach Trip through Hardin County in 1855

by Paul W. Urbahns

Bayard Taylor (1825-1878) was a poet and well-known travel writer supplying lively travel narratives of his journeys in the United States and abroad. In addition to his columns in *The Saturday Evening Post* and the *United States Gazette*, he also compiled several books. One of his most quoted, "Eldorado" published in 1850, recounted his trials as a newspaper correspondent in the 1849 California gold rush.

We turn our attention to his book, "At Home and Abroad: A Sketch-Book of Life, Scenery, and Men" published in 1860. This book is a series of short, detached sketches and the record of short excursions, and episodes of travel.

In the book, Taylor details his trip by stagecoach from Louisville to Mammoth Cave, which includes the account of his observations of life in Hardin County during May and June 1855.



Bayard Taylor  
Library of  
Congress

Taylor began his Kentucky journey by writing, "We were a family party of six, and ourselves and our baggage, including a bucket for the horses, just filled two carriages. Coming from New Albany, crossing the Ohio into Portland, we struck the Nashville turnpike on the outskirts of Louisville, and took up our journey towards Salt River, twenty-two miles distant. The country through which we passed is low, slightly undulating and very fertile. Now and then appeared an old family mansion surrounded by its orchards and gardens and presenting much the same aspect of comfort and repose as the country homesteads of Pennsylvania and Virginia. Our journey was very pleasant although the afternoon was intensely hot and sultry.

"Toward evening we came again upon the Ohio—the Beautiful River, here as elsewhere—and followed its bank to the mouth of Salt River, on the opposite bank of which is West Point, our resting place for the night.

“Where it debouches into the Ohio, Salt River is not more than fifty or sixty yards in breadth, but very deep. It is never fordable even in the driest seasons; and, being navigable for fourteen miles above its mouth, has not been bridged at this point. We descended its steep and difficult banks, embarked our carriages upon a flat ferry boat, and were conveyed across. The view, looking up the river, was very beautiful. Tall elms and sycamores clothed the banks, dropping their boughs almost to the water, and forming a vista of foliage through which the stream curved out of sight between wooded hills. I longed to be rowed up it...”

It’s unfortunate, Taylor does not mention where they spent the night at West Point. However, it must be remembered that four of the early homes that served as taverns/inns where the numerous river and stagecoach travelers passing through the area could obtain room and board. The two most used were, The Young’s Inn, constructed about 1797, served as General Sherman’s headquarters during the Civil War, and the Ditto-Landsdale House, built in 1823, was used as a hospital during the Civil War and as a canteen by Fort Knox Troops during WWI.



Young’s Inn at West Point, Kentucky

The Young’s Inn became a famous stagecoach stop on the old Louisville & Nashville Turnpike and was built ca. 1797 by James Young. At this inn John James Audubon wrote about seeing large flocks of passenger pigeons. Jenny Lind stopped here briefly in 1851 and sang from front steps. Other guests have been Henry

Clay, Andrew Jackson, James Buchanan, and Wendell Willkie.

Taylor continues, “About nine o’clock the next day the clouds broke a little, the rain of the night ceased, and we started for Elizabethtown. After passing two or three miles of fertile bottoms, studded with noble beech woods, the road entered a glen in the Muldraugh Hills, a long, lateral branch of the Cumberland Range, which stretches quite through the centre of Kentucky. The road we were travelling is one of the finest in the United States—broad, smooth, and thoroughly macadamized.

It follows the windings of the glen for three or four miles, so well graded that the ascent is barely perceptible. A brook swollen by the rains formed below us, now on this side, now on that, while numbers of tiny streams spouted from openings in the limestone rocks on either hand. The elms and beeches in the bed of the glen almost met above our heads, yet did not hide the slopes of splendid foliage of which they were the hem. In one of the wildest spots the mouth of a cavern opened on the right hand, pouring out a smooth cascade of silvery water. The scarlet aquilegia, the phlox, the white purslane, the violet, and other Spring flowers, grew in the crevices of the rocks, and brightened the fairy solitude.”

The area described is now a portion of the historic Louisville & Nashville walking trail designated as the “Bridges to the Past” site at the foot of Muldraugh Hill at the southern boundary of West Point. The trail leads off US 31W and follows a wandering path up the hill on a paved surface road. This route

affords modern visitors an opportunity to experience the same basic view as seen by Taylor 166 years ago.

Described by Bayard Taylor as “The road we were travelling...broad, smooth, and thoroughly



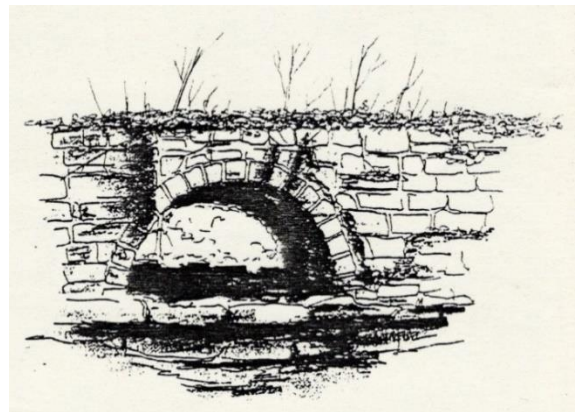
macadamized. It follows the windings of the glen for three or four miles, so well graded that the ascent is barely perceptible. A brook swollen by the rains formed below us, now on this side”

*This 1918 postcard shows the old L&N turnpike road on the right with the swollen brook on the left side of the photo. - Kirkpatrick Studio, Indianapolis Indiana.*



*West Point historian Richard Briggs examines a portion of the macadamized roadbed of the old Louisville and Nashville turnpike, beneath the modern asphalt surface, at the Bridges to the Past walking trail. – Photo by Paul W. Urbahns*

*One of the magnificent stone arch bridges Taylor’s stagecoach would have crossed. Built in the 1840s, these stone bridges were constructed each time the turnpike road crossed a creek or other water course.*



We return to Taylor’s description on page 183 “After reaching the summit of the glen, we entered a rolling upland region, heavily wooded with forests of oak, hickory, and maple. The soil was thin and stony, and the country had rather a poor and unfertile aspect compared with that along the Ohio River. The farm houses were mostly built of logs, and many of them had what might be termed an enclosed portico—a square opening of the height of the first story—passing entirely through them. All, even the poorest, had their negro hut or huts adjoining, although some of the latter appeared to be tenantless. The impression these establishments made upon me was that of moderate activity, intelligence ditto, and content with things as they are. We met many men on horseback, dressed in what appeared to be

homespun cloth—tall, large-limbed, robust individuals, and fine specimens of animal health and vigor.”

This begins a section of his narration where Taylor is apparently struck by the hospitality and friendliness of the local population. “Occasionally we passed large, canvas-covered wagons, drawn by three or four horses. The farmers saluted us with the stiff, silent nod peculiar to Anglo-Saxons, but the negro teamster frequently raised his hat to the ladies. We saw but a single carriage, driven by a gentleman who politely gave us the best side of the road, notwithstanding he was entitled to it. The same thing would not have happened north of the Ohio River.”

Upon entering the present-day Radcliff area, he writes, “We stopped for dinner at the Cool Spring tavern. The landlord, who had very much the air of a parson, received us with much ceremony, and then blew dolorously upon a conch shell until “the boys,” who were at work in a distant field, heard the summons and hurried home to take charge of our horses. We were regaled with Kentucky ham, eggs, excellent coffee, and cornbread of that peculiar sweetness and excellence which only a Southern cook can give it. Indeed, the excellence of the country taverns in Kentucky was a matter of constant surprise to me. Without a single exception we were treated with a cordiality, and even kindness which gave them all a friendly and home-like air, quite different from the dreary aspect of similar institutions north of the Ohio. The fare also was as notably good as it is notably bad in the more progressive States of the West. Kentucky may be called slow in comparison with Ohio and Illinois, but there is more genuine comfort and more genial social feeling within her borders than in either of the latter States.”

The Cool Spring Tavern is presently known as the “Haycraft Inn” and on the National Register of Historic Places. The original portion of the house was built by Coleman Lewis about 1814, prior to his service in the War of 1812. About 1820, he sold the house and grounds to Daniel Kelly Haycraft, who built the addition on the home and started operating an inn and stagecoach stop on the Louisville and Nashville Turnpike.



*Elizabeth Haycraft Petersen, descendent of Daniel K. Haycraft, standing in front of the plantation house, known as the Cool Spring tavern, located in present-day Radcliff, Ky. - Photo by Paul W. Urbahns*

Though our stagecoach story deals with a pre-Civil War era, a few years later Elizabeth Haycraft, Daniel’s wife, would decide to take a defensive action to protect a family heirloom, the engraved initialed silver service. Striking upon a plan to bury the silver until after the hostilities of the War Between the States had ended, she buried her box of silver tableware under a flowering fern bed with

no one the wiser. The family silver stayed secure from all marauders. When questioned about family valuables, the Haycrafts simply stated everything of value had been taken by previous raiding soldiers.

Following the end of the war, the Haycrafts simply dug up the fern bed and retrieved their family silverware. Fast forward now to 2005, when Elizabeth Haycraft Petersen a descendent of the Daniel K. Haycraft, decided the silver should be kept at the old family plantation. She presented the current owners Jo and John Emary the portion of the family silver she inherited engraved with the initials of D K H.



*Elizabeth Haycraft Petersen (right) returns part of the Haycraft family silver, engraved with the initials of D K H, to the current owner of the Haycraft Inn, Jo Emary (left) pictured with Rebecca (Becci) Martin. Photo –Paul W. Urbahns.*

Daniel Elmo McClure’s “Two Centuries in Elizabethtown and Hardin County” gives us the following stagecoach mileage figures: Louisville to Medley’s (Meadow Lawn) – 10 miles; Medley’s to West Point- 10 miles; West Point to Trueman’s – 8 miles; Trueman’s to Haycraft’s- 7 miles; Haycraft’s to Elizabethtown – 9 miles; Elizabethtown to Nolin – 9 miles; Nolin to Lucas’ -10 miles; Lucas’ to Munfordville – 10 miles.

This listing two important points. First stagecoach travel did not stop when the railroads were constructed and secondly, stagecoaches typically stopped every 10 miles to change horses, with over-night stops approximately 40 miles apart.



At the bottom of page 184 of Taylor’s book we find his description as the trip continues. “Beyond Elizabethtown, we journeyed for ten miles through a rich, well-wooded rolling country to the village of Nolin, on the creek of the same name, and halted for the night at the tavern of Mr. Gehagan [Geoghegan?]”.

Nolin appears to have been a prosperous small community, prior to the coming of the railroad. The post office was established on May 25, 1836, with a spelling of Nolen. David Burr’s 1839 map identifies the town as Nolensville, a primary location on the turnpike road between Elizabethtown and Munfordville. The spelling was officially changed to Nolin in 1859, with the coming of the railroad.

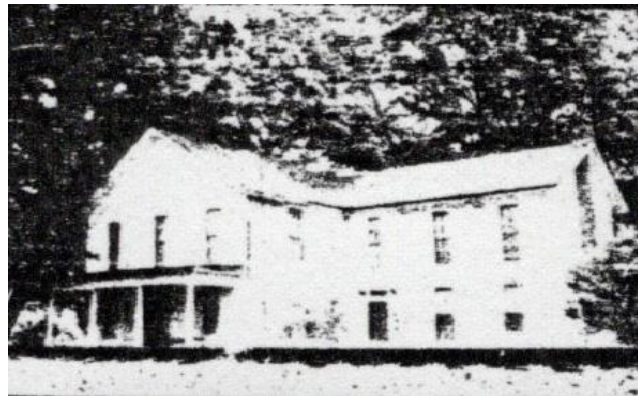
[left] An excerpt from David Burr’s 1839 map, identifying Nolin as a stop on the Louisville-Nashville Turnpike and identified as “Nolensville”. Courtesy Library of Congress.

Taylor continues his comments on the Nolin Hotel, “We found a wood fire in the

wide chimney very agreeable, for the evening air was unexpectedly cool. I am told that fires are frequently kindled in the evenings as late as the beginning of June. With this custom, however, is connected that of leaving the doors open, which insures ventilation. It belongs perhaps to the outdoor life of the Kentuckians, for I found few doors that would shut closely. We were greatly amused by the impossibility of keeping our doors closed. In almost all cases everyone who enters, master or servant, leaves them wide behind him. I rather like the habit, but it takes a little time to get used to it."

Without any evidence to the contrary, the Nolin Hotel appears to have been later known as the Brokaw Hotel, Hardin County Historical Inventory site HD-64. Local researcher Johnny Lay believes the building was probably built by J.C. Dorsey, who later sold land for the railroad depot constructed nearby.

*Floor plan of the Borkaw Hotel in Nolin, Ky. Drawn by Catherine C. Harned for the Kentucky Historic Resources Inventory of Hardin County, 1983.*



*The Nolin Hotel, pictured ca 1985 courtesy of Randall and Shirley Ramsey, provided by Johnny Lay.*

The floor plan of the Brokaw Hotel indicates the front entrance led into an area designated as the "reception area" where travelers could secure a drink and a meal before retiring to bed. The hotel was rather large consisting of five guest rooms upstairs and five down.

The Hardin County Historical Inventory documentation, dated, 1983, described the building as being in "Poor" condition, vacant, with the owner listed as the "estate of William Meredith. The building was subsequently sold to Randall Ramsey, who tore the building down in 1985. Before exiting Hardin County, Taylor goes on to mention his journey past Nolin as "In the wood through which our road lay we frequently saw fat rabbits leaping among the bushes, and once a large wild turkey darted across the path before us."

In summarizing our area Taylor wrote about the "wide, undulating landscape blooming and breathing of Spring, and a pale blue sky of the utmost clearness overhead. I found the journey delightful." It is truly a treasure that we have this early description of some of the sites in Hardin

County, by a well renowned and respected observer of people and places. You can easily read the remainder of this incredible journey by simply googling "Bayard Taylor At Home and Abroad 1860."

Special thanks to Johnny Lay and Adam King of the Hardin County Planning and Development office for their assistance.

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A very special thanks to Paul Urbahns for sharing in the bits and Pieces. If you have a topic or an article, please contact Mike Bell 270 401-8848.



**July 26<sup>th</sup> Historic Society Meeting**  
**Cunningham Garden's at the Brown Pusey House**  
**Boxed Dinner served at 7**  
**Gary West will be the speaker**

Gary West grew up in Elizabethtown and attended WKU before graduating from U of K in 1967 with a degree in Journalism. While at U of K, Gary work as sports editor of the Kentucky Kernel.

Throughout his extensive career he has served as executive director of the Hilltopper Athletic Foundation at WKU, provided color commentary for West Strader on the Hilltopper Basketball Network, and served as executive director of the Bowling Green Area Convention and Visitors Bureau. He retired from there in 2006 to devote more time to his writing.

He is a freelance writer for several magazines in addition to writing a syndicated newspaper travel column, Out & About...Kentucky Style, for several papers across the state. Gary is in demand as a speaker and for book signings throughout Kentucky. He has authored 17 books.

Gary and his wife, Deborah, live in Bowling Green.

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**ITEMS FOR MEMBERSHIP TO CONSIDERATION**

**1. EXTENSION TO PRESENT OFFICERS TERM FOR ONE YEAR**

<b>President</b>	<b>Josh Cooper</b>	<b>Vice Pres.</b>	<b>Kenny Tabb</b>
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President</b>	<b>Beverly Goodman</b>	<b>Secretary</b>	<b>John Ashcraft</b>
<b>Treasurer</b>	<b>Sam Davis</b>	<b>Meal Planner</b>	<b>Beverly Goodman</b>
<b>Bits &amp; Pieces Ed</b>	<b>Mike Bell</b>		

**2. INCREASE CATERED MEALS TO \$15.00**

## **PRESIDENTS CORNER**

Dear Members:

Exciting news to relate is that we will finally be meeting again in July. Our plan is to meet in the garden at the Brown Pusey House and Gary West will be our speaker. Because it will be outside in July, we will be meeting later than normal, with the dinner starting at 7p.m.

We will have a few items of club business to discuss concerning whether or not to hold elections this year, on the normal two year schedule, or delay a year because of the pandemic. Additionally, we will need to get a feel from the Club on catering and the prices for meals.

I look forward to seeing everyone in July!

*Josh Cooper*

Hardin County Historical Society

P O Box 381

Elizabethtown, Kentucky 42702

**Meeting: July 26 7 pm**

Brown Pusey House

Call (270) 270-765-2515 to RSVP

Before: 7/21

