

# Bits and Pieces

of Hardin County History

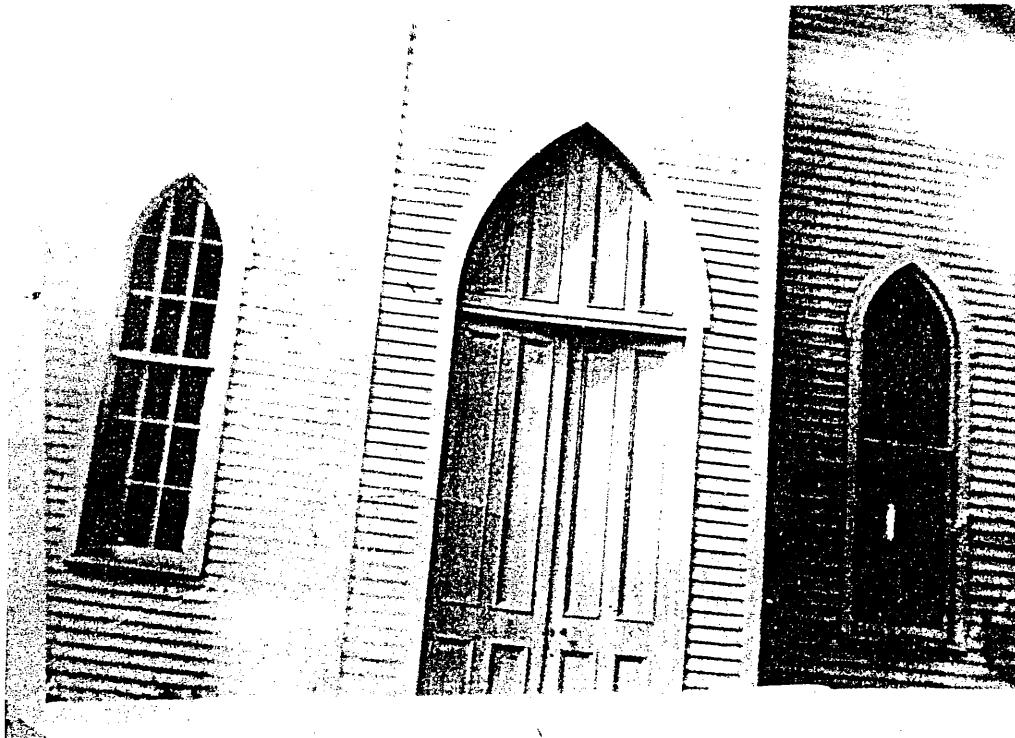
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MARY JO JONES, EDITOR

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## SAINT ELIZABETH CATHOLIC CHURCH



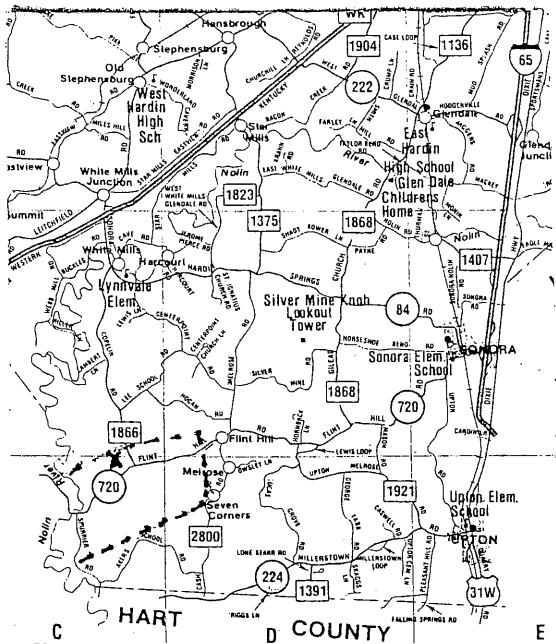
Doorway of St. Elizabeth Catholic Church

In the early 1800's a small community of Catholics moved into the area east of White Mills known as Harcourt. These Catholic families were visited occasionally by missionaries, and for many years mass was said in the log home of Sylvester Boarman.

In about 1830, with the establishment of Bethlehem Academy, the first resident priest arrived in Hardin County. He attended several missions in the county, including

Harcourt. The congregation at Harcourt, known as St. Ignatius, was encouraged to give consideration to building a church. A small brick structure was completed in 1842.

This parish continued to grow until about 1878 when several families in the Akers Valley area decided to build a church in their neighborhood. A conveniently located tract of six acres was given to the church by S. M. and Rachel Peerce. In 1926



X - Location of St. Elizabeth Church  
 - - - Approximate Area of Akers Valley

when the church was abandoned, Mr. and Mrs. Peerce deeded the land, containing the cemetery and the church building, to the Roman Catholic Bishop of Louisville.

The Akers Valley parish was known as St. Elizabeth. Plans for the building were drawn, and contributions were solicited. People were poor, but they gave what they could. The building was constructed, weatherboarded on the outside. The interior walls were finished with laths, ready for plaster.

(Sources: Interview with Jerome Peerce, Jan. 5, 2002; Public records of Hardin County; Mary M. Olson, *A Complete Index to Webb's Centenary of Catholicity in Kentucky*; Letter, Fr. Dale Cieslik, April 1, 2002; Ben. J. Webb, *The Centenary of Catholicity in Kentucky*.)

By this time, the money had all been spent. The parishioners were again solicited for contributions to complete the interior of the building. They were farmers who barely made a living for their families. The reply was, "We've given all we can."

The building was never finished on the inside. The walls were never plastered. There were pews, likely home-made, and there was a communion rail, also constructed crudely by members. There were two wood stoves for heating in the winter; however, services were not held in severe weather, as members came in horse-drawn vehicles. The Henry Beeler home in Akers Valley was always home to the visiting pastors of St. Elizabeth until the death of Mrs. Beeler in 1903.

St. Elizabeth continued to minister to the small congregation until it closed in 1926 because of the small number of families constituting the parish. The building was razed in 1934. Today, only the foundation stones of the building and the cemetery remain. On a visit to the cemetery in 1980, sixteen graves marked with legible stones were found. There were a number of other graves, recognizable by field stones and/or depressions in the earth.

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## AIRPLANES AT GLENDALE

### *Emergency Landing Field in Hardin County*

About 1930, residents of Hardin County noted an increase in air traffic in the local area. One or more airplanes passed over almost every day. Previously only an occasional barn-stormer visited Elizabethtown with his two-seated plane, taking local residents on a twenty-minute ride over the town and countryside for about \$3.00. His 'landing field' was generally a farmer's cow pasture near town. Local residents were curious in August, 1931, when a couple from Owensboro, both of whom were licensed pilots, flew here for a week-end. They landed in a field on the farm of Silas English, a mile west of town.

Meanwhile, the U. S. Postal Department had found that moving the mail by air was not only possible, but desirable. Contract air mail routes were established between major cities throughout the country. For the sake of safety, plans included beacons at intervals of about ten miles, and emergency landing fields about every fifty miles along the airway routes. One such airway was the Louisville-to-Dallas route, passing almost directly over Elizabethtown.

It was announced in April, 1931, that four lighthouses were to be located in Hardin County to guide the mail planes. These beacons, with fifty-foot towers, were to be located at Tine Huffman's farm near Wooldridge Ferry bridge; Julius Farley's farm near Elizabethtown; a point three miles west of Sonora; and on the Hardin-Hart county line at Cash. An Elizabethtown newspaper observed that these beacons, being located often in remote rural sections, indicated "the march of progress" in the United States.

Residents of Elizabethtown were excited, in April, 1931, to learn that Elizabethtown had been chosen as the site of an emergency landing field, to be located on the farm of Julius Farley, at that time about one mile southwest of town. (This area now--2002--is well within the city limits.) The City Council proposed naming the airport "Wells Field"

in honor of Starling Wells, Jr., a local young man who had lost his life in an airplane crash in April, 1929. However, the Commerce Department explained that it was customary to name the government landing fields after the post office address nearest to their locations.

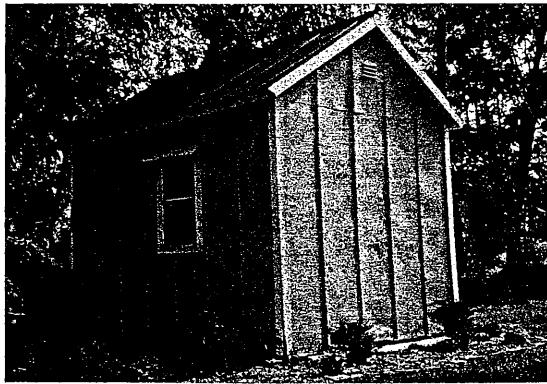
The other Kentucky field was built at Smith's Grove. These intermediate landing fields were established and maintained by the Aeronautics Branch of the Department of Commerce along the Federal airways for use by aircraft which needed to make emergency landings between terminal points along the route.

Bids were taken for the grading, draining and fencing of Elizabethtown's new landing field on the Farley farm, and the contract was let to the Jenkins Construction Company of Elizabethtown.

However, in November, 1931, plans were abruptly changed and the site of the field was moved to Glendale. The Farley farm was deemed undesirable because the runways were too short, there were unfavorable surrounding land altitudes, and nearby power lines created an obstruction.

A 70-acre tract on the farm of W. B. Coyle, a mile north of Glendale, was selected. It was found that the Coyle land would allow longer runways, without obstructions, than the one near Elizabethtown. The Department of Commerce leased the tract for a period of five years at a monthly rental of \$700. It was designated Site 75-B, Dallas-Louisville Airway.

In December the engineers set stakes for the grade and drainage on the proposed field. It appeared there was not a great deal of work to be done, as the Coyle field had natural drainage. The work was reportedly to be completed as soon as the contract could be let. In *Airway Bulletin No. 1*, January 1, 1936, the Glendale field was described as a "Department of Commerce intermediate field, site



Utility Building (2002 Photo)

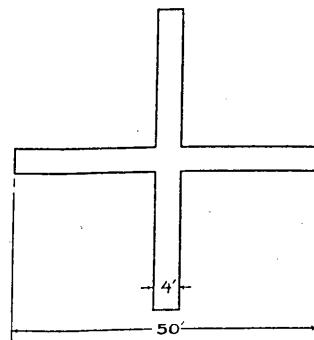
75B, Dallas-Louisville Airway." It was located one-half mile northeast of Glendale, latitude 37°37'; longitude 85°55'; altitude 694 feet. It was triangular, sod, level, with natural drainage. There were three landing strips: NW/SE 2,400 feet, NE/SW 2,200 feet, and E/W 2,560 feet. "75B D-L" was painted on the power-shed roof. There were buildings, trees, and a blinker to the north and pole lines on the west. There was a blinker on the field flashing characteristic "5" (.\_.) and a 24-inch beacon with green course lights also flashing "5" (.\_.) located on a hill  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile southwest. There were no servicing facilities. Pilots with disabled planes that could not be readily repaired often spent the night at the Coyle home, as there were no other overnight accommodations available in Glendale. They would share with family members exciting tales of their travels.

In a conversation with John Coyle, son of W. B. Coyle, who was a teen-ager in the 1930's, I received a wealth of information on the day-to-day operations. John described the beacon tower, about 87 feet high, which he climbed many times to change or repair lights. There were marker lights at the ends of the runways; ordinarily they were green, but if the weather was bad or snow or water on the field made landing unsafe, the lights would be changed to red. This had to be done by hand. The blinking lights on top of the tower had to be changed likewise. About 60 feet up on the tower was a catwalk, without side rails, at the end of which was a windsock, bright yellow-orange, 7 or 8 feet long. It revolved freely 360 degrees and showed the wind direction very clearly. If it became worn or tangled and had to be replaced, W. B. Coyle did the work himself—he would allow no one else to maintain the windsock. John said it was a very scary job.

In addition to the tower, there was a small utility building on the field, and both that and the

tower were enclosed by a fence. The building contained all spare lights and replacement bulbs. It was necessary for someone to walk the perimeter of the field daily to insure that all lights were functioning.

There was a marker identifying this as an auxiliary landing field. It was a white gravel cross made up of two straight strokes 4 feet wide by 50 feet long, intersecting at right angles at their midpoint. It was Coyle's responsibility to keep this marker maintained and free of grass and weeds, so as to be readily visible from the air.

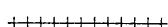


Marker used at Auxiliary Landing Fields

According to John, even before World War II, units from Fort Knox used the field for training--touch-and-go landing and taking off. This use continued until about 1942.

The lease on the property was not renewed when it expired on June 30, 1943. About 1949 representatives of the U. S. government (CAA?) removed the beacon, all lights, and all wiring above ground. They left the underground cable which connected the perimeter lights, as well as the utility building. The Coyles removed the underground cable and used it to wire the farmhouse. The utility building was moved near the house, where it may be seen today.

(Sources: Elizabethtown newspapers, 1931; Public records of Hardin County; Interviews with John Coyle and Michael Coyle; *General Airway Information (Airway Bulletin No. 2)*, U. S. Department of Commerce, Sept. 1, 1931; *Descriptions of Airports and Landing Fields in the United States (Airway Bulletin No. 2)*, U. S. Department of Commerce, Jan. 1, 1936.)



## ***John C. Pirtle and Woodrow Wilson***

*(The Elizabethtown News, Aug. 2, 1935)*

Well remembered by hundreds of Kentuckians are the visits to the State of the slender, crisp-featured Woodrow Wilson in 1912 and again as President in 1916, but only a few recall his first visit as a bespectacled, youngish scholar of 42 when he delivered lectures at Hodgenville in 1898.

A canceled \$60 check, drawn to the order of Mr. Wilson and endorsed with his signature, is perhaps the only documentary record of that first visit. It is a prized possession of John C. Pirtle, farmer at Howevalley, and one-time superintendent of Elizabethtown schools.

Made by Mr. Pirtle, the check was in payment of Mr. Wilson's expenses for the lectures, drawn on the Larue County Deposit Bank at Hodgenville June 23, 1898. Mr. Pirtle was then conducting the Kentucky Review and Professional School, a summer school in conjunction with Hodgenville's old Kenyon College, of which he was founder and president. Mr. Wilson, then a professor at Princeton University, was one of a number of visiting lecturers who augmented the faculty.

"Wilson spoke in the building which is now the old part of the Hodgenville High School," Mr. Pirtle recalls. "His topics were United States history and government, and he made strong pleas for patriotism. I was so impressed by his words that I was sure he would become a nationally prominent figure. When this check was canceled and returned to me, I said, 'I'm going to keep this because that man will some day be President of the United States.'"

The only person who agreed with him, he says, was the late George Kirkpatrick, Hodgenville merchant, a Republican. Mr. Pirtle does not recall how or from where Mr. Wilson came to Hodgenville, but remembers that he went on to Nashville to lecture at Vanderbilt University.

"His appearance was much the same as when he was elected President; he was tall and thin and had the keenest, most intelligent, penetrating eyes I have ever seen," he said.

Mr. Pirtle, born seventy-nine years ago in the house in which he now lives, has been a farmer all of his life, although he devoted most of his time to educational work for many years and served two terms as a State Representative.

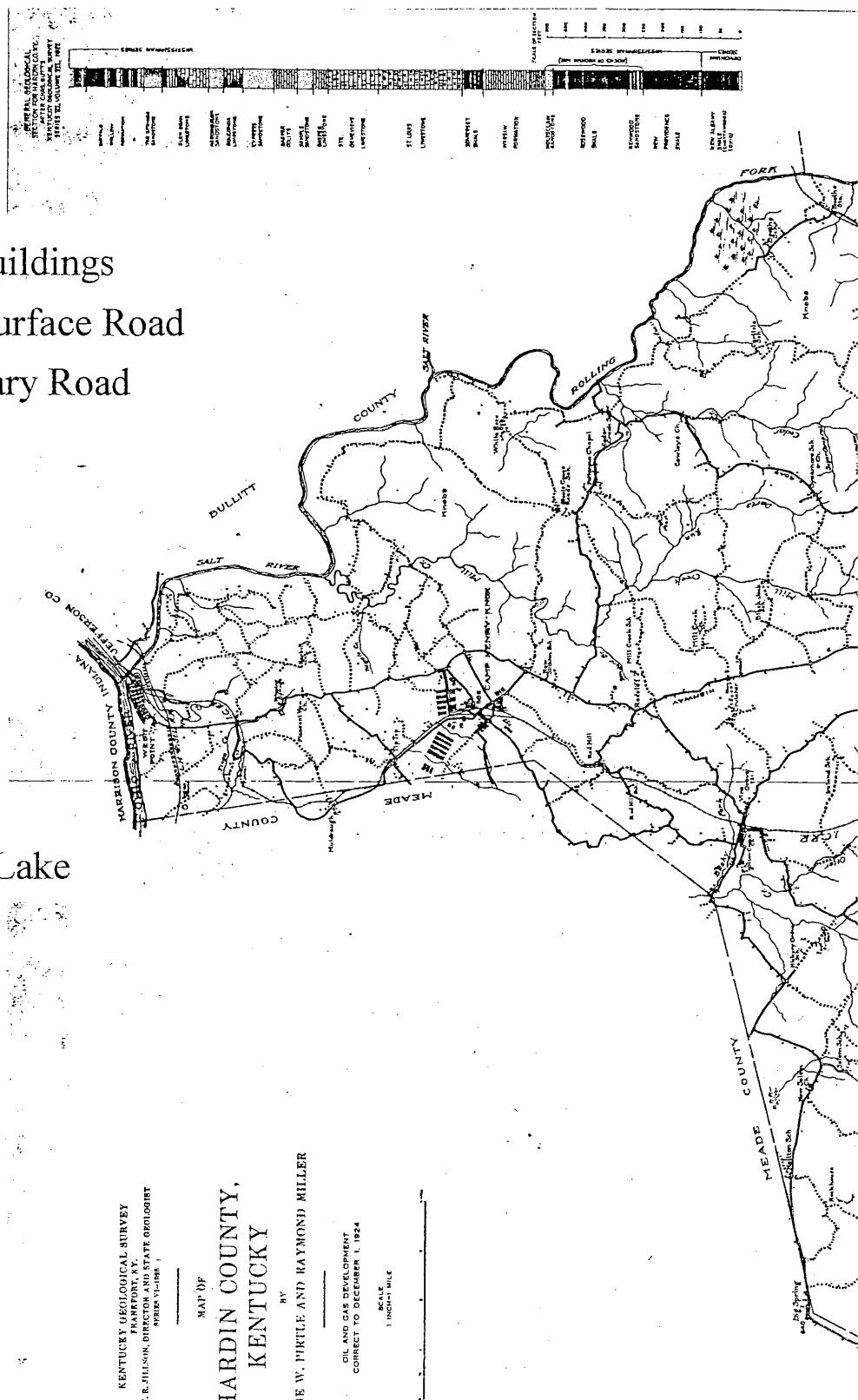
"We wanted to pay Wilson properly, but he refused to accept more than this check, which only met his board and traveling expenses," Mr. Pirtle says. "He told me he was glad to give the school such assistance as he could."

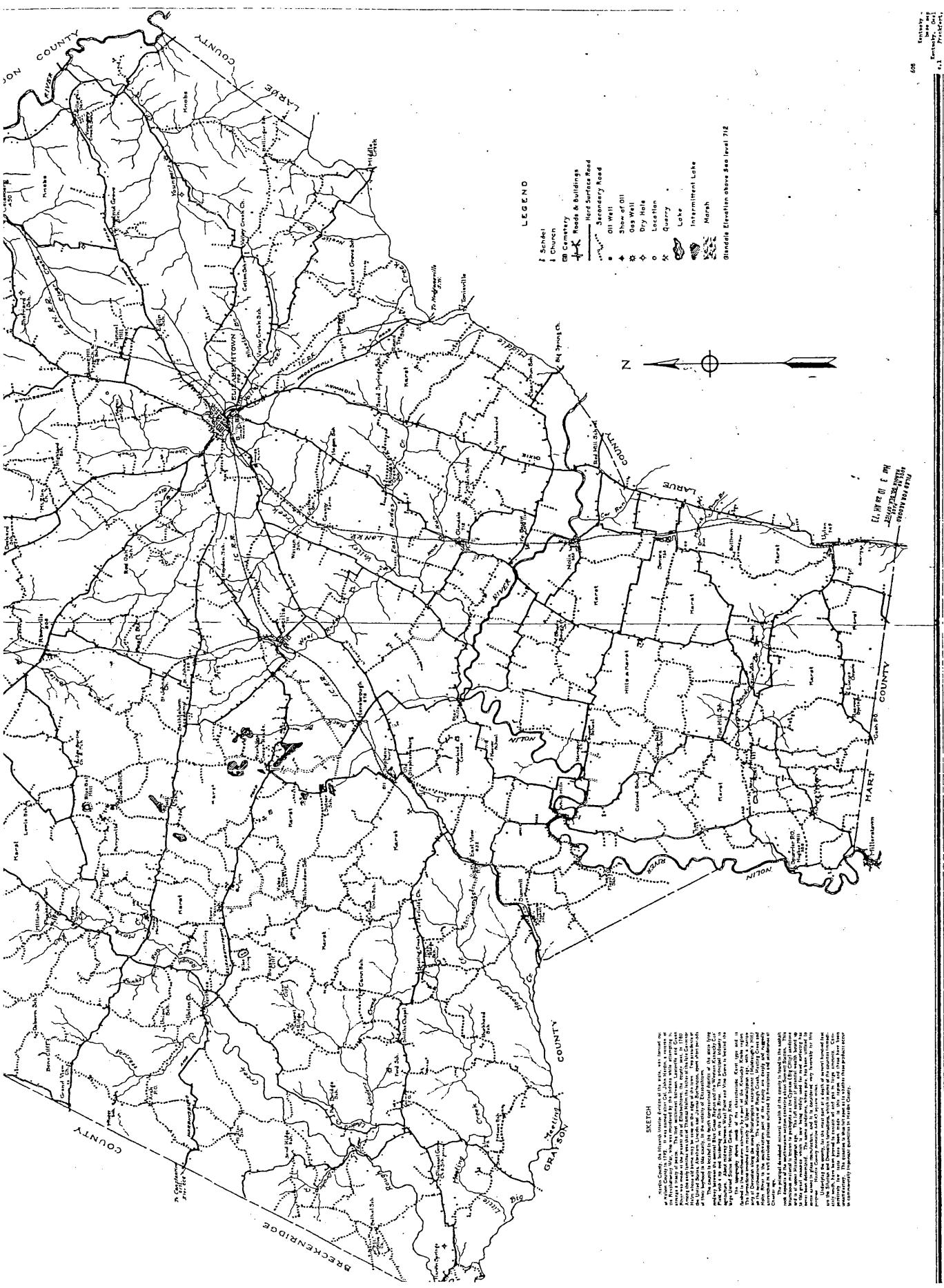
Among others who lectured during the same session, Mr. Pirtle recalls Opie Read, William Lightfoot Vischer, John Temple Graves, Fred Emerson Brooks and Dr. Byron W. King. . . .

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## LEGEND

- School
- ▲ Church
- Cemetery
- Roads & Buildings
- Hard Surface Road
- Secondary Road
- Oil Well
- ◆ Show of Oil
- ◆ Gas Well
- ◆ Dry Hole
- Location
- Quarry
- Lake
- Intermittent Lake
- Marsh





## ***Two Aviators Killed***

Two Camp Knox aviators lost their lives shortly after eleven o'clock yesterday morning when the machine in which they were flying crashed 3,000 feet to the ground.

They were Lieut. J. T. Lawton, Hartford, Conn., and Private Joseph Reade, Norwood, N. J.

The fall occurred when Lieut. Lawton, the pilot, failed to bring his machine out of a tailspin, which he had been executing. Whether engine trouble or the high wind caused the accident is not known.

The machine fell near the quarters of the 81<sup>st</sup> Field Artillery.

Brig. Gen. Lassiter, Camp Commander, appointed a Board to investigate the accident.

The men's bodies will be shipped to their homes.

Lieut. Lawton was 24 and Private Reade was 20.

*(The Elizabethtown News, March 8, 1921)*

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## ***George Washington Owned Land in Hardin County***

(Editorial, *The Elizabethtown News*, date unknown)

George Washington, the first President of the United States, bought from Lighthorse Harry Lee 5,000 acres of land in two tracts in Kentucky. This land was purchased by Washington from Lee before Kentucky was admitted to Statehood, and when Kentucky was admitted in 1792 the deed was lodged in record with the Clerk of the Court of Appeals of Kentucky. Lee probably acquired this land for services in the Revolutionary War. This land was all located in what is now Grayson county but was once Hardin county.

Allen P. Cubbage, of Leitchfield, the Commonwealth's Attorney for this district, who has seen a copy of the original deed, made a research into the matter and at the request of the editor of *The News* gives the following interesting facts:

"Copy of the deed which I have from Henry Lee to George Washington shows that on November 5, 1798, in consideration of 600 pounds current money of Virginia, two tracts of land, containing 3,000 and 2,000 acres, respectively, were conveyed. On the occasion of the Bicentennial Celebration of the birth of George Washington, Col. Lawrence Martin, Director of the Division of Maps of the Library of Congress, was designated to locate definitely all of the lands owned by Washington. He requested Judge Samuel Wilson, of Lexington, Ky., to locate these two tracts of land. About all he could tell from the boundaries was that these lands were between Green River and Rough Creek, and he enlisted my aid. As soon as I read the deed I was convinced that the lands were all located in what is now Grayson county, at Yeaman, near Falls of Rough. The deed calls in one or two places for David Letche's 15,000 acre survey, which is located in Grayson county. Also the beginning corner of the Washington lands is on the south side of Rough Creek, 120 poles below the mouth of Short Creek. I also knew this was in Grayson county. In looking to see if there were any old records which would throw any light upon the subject, I found a copy of an order of the Grayson County Court in 1814. This copy was certified by Edwin Thomas, and I am personally acquainted with his handwriting. The order sustained the petition of James Landrum for a writ of *aquadammum* to build a water grist mill, and he was granted the right to erect the mill upon land located in Grayson county, Kentucky, by paying to the heirs of George Washington two dollars for an acre of land. This was at what was then known as Oldham's Ford on Rough Creek.

"The will of George Washington provided that he owned 5,000 acres of land in Kentucky on the waters of Rough Creek, which he valued at \$2.00 an acre, because of the evidence of iron ore. Just across Rough Creek from this land is a hill, known as Iron Ore Hill.

"With this information in hand I requested the State Geologist to have the land surveyed, which was done, and it was all found to be in Grayson county. The beginning corner is across Rough Creek from Breckinridge county and extends down the creek to a point across from Ohio county. These lands are now owned by the following: Hardin Porter, Virgil Dawson's heirs, S. H. Decker, Charles Carter, W. B. Smith, W. A. Young, Rector Decker, Fred Cummings, Robt. Hopper, Ted Beatty, Will Decker, Sam Young, Jane Patterson, Grayson Wilson, Will Porter's heirs, Ches Carter, George Barton, Martin Decker, Henry Davison, Chas. Godsey, Les Young, Blummer Porter, James Rankin, Bud Sarver, Anderson Davison, Alva Landrum, John Hunstall, J. W. Smith's heirs, Spurrier Porter, Crit Porter, Ernest Wilhelm and Green Brothers.

"I am doubtful whether Washington ever saw this land. Allen's *History of Kentucky* says that Washington did some surveying in Kentucky on the Big Sandy River and the Little Sandy between 1767 and 1770. Judge Wilson says this was not earlier than 1770. Some Kentucky historians say that Washington was never in Kentucky."

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## *Pate Signed by Memphis Team*

*(The Elizabethtown News, March 6, 1931)*

James Pate, of this city, has been signed by the Memphis team of the Southern Association, and will be given a try-out by that club as a catcher. He leaves tonight for Memphis to report for spring training. His salary was fixed at \$175 a month. The Memphis club trains at home, and Pate will remain in Memphis until the Southern season begins about April 5.

Pate has been on the receiving end of the Elizabethtown Coca-Cola team's battery for several years, and is rated as one of the best amateurs in this part of the State.

(NOTE: The above James Pate was the father of Elizabethtown attorney James L. Pate.)

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## **GEORGE AND SUSAN KLINGLESITH OF HOWEVALLEY**

*(Source: A. H. Redford, *The History of Methodism in Kentucky* (Nashville, 1870), Vol. III, pp. 209-211)*

There lived at this time [1822-1823], in Howe's Valley, in Hardin county, George and Susan Klingsmith. They were both born in Westmoreland county, Pennsylvania, and were of German parentage. Mr. Klingsmith was born in August, 1769, and his wife in 1781. They came to the West in 1801, soon after their marriage, and settled first in Nelson county, but the following year removed to Breckinridge, and six years later to Hardin.

In 1803 Mrs. Klingsmith became a Methodist, and the next year her husband followed her example. Their house at once was a chapel and a home for the preachers. Deeply pious, and distinguished for their earnestness and zeal, they were instrumental in accomplishing much good. Mrs. Klingsmith, especially, with her good, sound sense and fervent piety, presented the claims of religion on all proper occasions: Not only at home in the domestic circle did her piety shine, but in the class and prayer-meetings, as well as in the love-feasts, she bore her testimony to the power of saving grace. The language in which she spoke was broken English, and her prayers and speeches, though powerful in their effect, were remarkably brief.

On one occasion, at a love-feast, she arose and said: "Brudders and sisters, I has religion, I knows I has religion, I feel it in mine heart." She said no more, but that short speech, uttered with unction, thrilled the entire assembly. She was in the habit, too, of leading in public prayer. At another time, at the close of a prayer, she said, "Lord, I'sh done." Her husband, who was present, feeling mortified at the abrupt manner in which the prayer was terminated, exclaimed, in the presence of the assembly, "Vife, for vat you say, 'Lord, I'sh done'? Vy don't you bray like vite folks, and say, 'World vidout end. Amen'? If you don't bray like dat vay, you sha'n't bray no more."

Mr. Klingsmith finished his course October 1, 1858, in hope of eternal life, having been for fifty-four years a member of the Church. His pious wife still lives (1869), and converses freely and delightfully in reference to her prospects beyond the grave.

(NOTE: George and Susan were my g-g-g-grandparents. The house in which they lived in Howevalley is still standing and is known by many as the Pirtle Place. M.J.J.)

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## **PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE**

I am pleased to announce that progress is being made on obtaining a History Museum for Hardin County. A history museum organization committee has been established. Officers have been elected. The following officers have been elected to lead the effort to establish a history museum: Don Waters, President; Tim Walker, Vice-President; Tim Asher, Secretary; Kenny Tabb, Treasurer.

Some committees have been formed. The By-Laws Committee has presented a rough draft of the by-laws. The Finance Committee has proceeded with obtaining a 501 (c) (3) and becoming incorporated in order to obtain grants. Without the financial assistance of the Hardin County Historical Society, the Organization Committee would not have had the necessary seed money to do a 501 (c) (3) and incorporate. The Board of Directors voted to grant \$2,000.00 to the Museum Organization out of approximately \$13,000.00 that the Hardin County Historical Society had earmarked for a museum. The Collections Committee is in the process of writing a policy to cover the procedures for selecting and acquiring the artifacts to go in the museum. Last but not least, the Building Committee is looking at what it will entail to convert the Old Library Building into a museum.

It will be paramount that we receive grants in order for this project to become a reality. Dr. Ernest Thro will be working to obtain a grant(s) that will be so necessary in order for this project to be successful.

In the days to come, some of you will be asked to volunteer to serve on a committee or to help out with this endeavor. If you are not asked to assist and you are interested in this project, let us know. We can always use good people!

**Kenneth L. Tabb, President**

## ANNOUNCEMENT OF COMING EVENTS

The Hardin County Historical Society will meet Monday evening, July 22, 2002, at the Commonwealth Lodge, 708 East Dixie Avenue, Elizabethtown. Dinner will be at 6:30 PM. The meal will be served buffet style; the price is \$6.50, including tax and tip. Following dinner, there will be an intermission of fifteen minutes to allow clearing of the tables. The program will follow.

Carl Howell, Jr., Hodgenville attorney, will be the speaker. His talk will concern the events leading up to the Master Commissioner's sale at the Larue County Courthouse on August 28, 1905, of the Lincoln Birthplace Farm and the events leading up to that time. This discussion will pertain to both Hardin and Larue counties. Mr. Howell is a recognized authority on the history of the Lincoln area. He has co-authored three local county history books in the past four years. His first book, *Hardin and Larue Counties, 1890 to 1930*, is now in its fifth printing. He is Kentucky's premier postcard collector, with about 20,000 rare pre-1930 postcards in his collection. Many of his postcards have been published in *The Kentucky Explorer*, along with articles he has written for that monthly magazine.

For dinner reservations, call Meranda Caswell (765-2515) not later than NOON, Monday July 22<sup>nd</sup>. Membership in the Society is open to all interested persons. Annual dues are \$8.00; however, NEW MEMBERS may join for the remainder of this year for \$4.00.

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**HARDIN COUNTY CIVIL WAR DAYS:** Sept. 21, 2002, at the Elizabethtown Tourism Building. Speakers for the day will be Dr. James A. Ramage, author of *Rebel Raider: The Life of General John Hunt Morgan*. Ramage will explain the person of Morgan and the events of the Christmas Raid. There will be a tour back in time to experience a Downtown Civil War Walking Tour where participants will meet General George Armstrong Custer, Emilie Todd Helm, Simon Bolivar Buckner and others who either lived or spent time in Elizabethtown during the War. The grand event of the day will be a Christmas Raid bus tour led by James Brewer, author of *The Raiders of 1862* and *Tom Worthington's Civil War: Shiloh, Sherman & the Search for Vindication*. This five-hour tour will visit Cemetery Hill where Morgan fired on the town; Fort Sands, built to defend the railroad trestle over Sulfur Fork; and the Hamilton House, Morgan's headquarters and battlefield of skirmish on the Rolling Fork.

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