

John Faris's Tavern, Terrible Harpes, Stephen Langford

(Continued from Page D-3)

I have said, and the official notice of the opening of it indicates, that the building of The Wilderness Road marked the beginning of peaceful passage through "the Wilderness". That is only relatively true. At times, civilized men may be as dangerous and as even more cruel than the savage Indians, as this incident will show.

"The Outlaws of Cave-in-Rock," by Otto A. Rothert, long time secretary of The Filson Club in Louisville, is a story about the terrible Harpes—Big Harpe and Little Harpe. One incident told by Mr. Rothert had its locale in Laurel county—at least the beginning of it—at the tavern of John Farris, Sr., and of his son William and daughter-in-law Jane. There will be more about John Farris in another article. But now to the Harpes.

Micajah "Big Harpe" and Wiley "Little Harpe" had been born in North Carolina in 1769 and 1770. In the Revolution their family was in sympathy with the English, and it was said they were of mixed blood. Big Harpe married a Susan Roberts, and in their depredations her sister Bettie went along, "wife of either as her fancy might dictate." They came to Tennessee and appeared to settle down on a little farm near Knoxville, from which they would supply Knoxville with butchered hogs and other meats they had stolen. It was said that they had been members of the renegade Creek and Cherokee groups that had ravaged the countryside. They committing most every sort of crime, Knoxville became too hot for them and the Harpes decided to transfer their operations to Kentucky, entering the State at Cumberland Gap in 1798. They held up and robbed a preacher, but returned his Bible and other goods and permitted him to proceed. Others were less fortunate, not living to tell the tale.

The Harpes killed a peddler named Peyton near Cumberland river in what is now Knox county. They killed two Marylanders named Paca and Bates.

Two Old Friends Meet In 1798

Stephen Langford of Virginia came to Kentucky. A traveling companion as far as Cumberland Gap had been David Irby, and separating there they agreed to meet at Frankfort, Old Lincoln county records, found in 1918, disclosed what happened after that. Langford had followed the Wilderness Road, passing the junction of the State road leading off toward Madison county, and stopped at John Farris's station west of Little Rockcastle river in late evening, Tuesday, Dec. 12, 1798, and spent the night there. John Farris, Sr., was a friendly man and in their conversation that night he and Langford were drawn closer together when they learned they once had been neighbors back in Virginia. As related by Mr. Rothert, John Farris, Sr., later swore "a man came to his house on the Wilderness road who called himself Langford and who, after he had told him his name, he recollected to have been acquainted with in Pittsylvania county, Virginia, in the youth of Thomas Langford."

Others Came At Breakfast Time
Early Wednesday morning other travelers came to Farris's Station as they were about to have breakfast. There were two men and three women in the group, all unkempt, and, according to their story, penniless. But even so they were not turned away. Inadvertently, Langford had said or done something that displeased Jane Farris, and disclaiming any mischievous intention said "that he would not offend her for all in his saddle bags, which was worth 500 pounds." Langford paid for the strangers' breakfasts and the six left together for the Settlements at Crab Orchard.

But Langford never got there. A few days later, men driving a drove of cattle to Virginia found a dead body of a man beside the Wilderness Road. The Farris recognized it as Stephen Langford. How could they have known that the strangers eating breakfast with them on that fateful morning had been the Harpes, the terrible killers?

The alarm was sounded and the chase was on. The Kentucky Gazette of Jan. 2, 1799, mentioned the discovery of the body on Dec. 14, and added, "We also learn Mr. Ballenger is in pursuit of them, with a determined resolution never to quit the chase until he has secured them." In the meanwhile, Capt. Joseph Ballenger, a Stanford merchant, had found the Harpes near Carpenter Station, now Houstonville, on Christmas day. Their examining trial got under way at Stanford, Jan. 4, 1799, with Esquires Hugh Logan, William Montgomery and Nathan Huston presiding judges, and Willis Green clerk. Among the evidence was a Free Mason's apron Ballenger had found. The Farris recognized the defendants and recited the happenings at their station. David Irby had come over from Frankfort and he and John Farris had "unburied" the body, and found it to be Langford. The

Harpes gave their names as "Roberts", except Big Harpe's wife herself Elizabeth Walker. The five were held to the District Court and taken to the Danville jail, from which the men managed to escape. The jailer's record had more about two of the women, who had added to the population of their clan at State expense. "Feb. 8, Betsey Walker, she being brought to bed by a son the previous night," and "March 7, Susanna Harpe, brought to bed by a daughter the preceding night. Paid cash midwife for ditto 18s." Suffice it to add here that the women were finally released, to join their men in a depredating forage through Southern Kentucky to their final notorious rendezvous at Cave-in-Rock on the Ohio river. Violent deaths awaited the terrible Big Harpe and the terrible Little Harpe.

Probably in 1798 John Farris's was the only tavern, also commonly called "stand," in Laurel county. Another was Ballinger's in present Bell county. Soon afterwards, though, there were many, and serving the travelers and taking care of their stock was the major source of cash income for many years. Hunters, too, profited from the venison and turkey, the bears and coons, they furnished the tavern keepers.

If we are to believe many legends that have come down to us—and we can't ignore them all—not everything was what it might have been, and more than once a missing traveler would be traced to a tavern and no further. But mostly the taverns were safe, their keepers hospitable, and generally, it might be presumed, compared favorably with their guests who were not always as saintly as Bishop Francis Asbury.

Tavern Rates Fixed By Counties
As protection to emigrants and travelers, tavern keepers were required to have licenses, and maximum rates they could charge were set by the counties. First tavern rates in Knox county, which included most of Southeastern Kentucky, including Laurel county, were given by Elmer Decker, historian, as follows:

For wine by the gallon or smaller quantity \$8.00.
For rum or French brandy by the gallon or smaller quantity 12 shillings.
Gin by the gallon or smaller quantity 24 shillings.

Cordial by the gallon or smaller quantity 24 shillings.
Brandy made of peaches by the gallon or smaller quantity 16 shillings.

Diet, for a warm dinner, supper or breakfast 1 shilling & 6 pence.
For a cold breakfast, supper or dinner 1 shilling.

Corn or oats by the bushel or smaller quantity 6 shillings.
Lodging per man for one night 6 pence.

To these rates were added charges for the keeping of hogs and sheep, and down through the years were subject to changes. Thus it can be seen tavern keepers did a flourishing business. The foundations of several fortunes were laid during this time.

One of the first regulations passed by the Laurel county court was setting charges permitted by taverns within its borders. The following charges were adopted on March 6, 1826.

For each meal 25 cents, lodging 12½ cents; horse to fodder or hay for night 25 cents; whisky, brandy, domestic gin, rum, wine, Holland gin and French brandy, 12½ cents per half pint. In May, 1827, charge for "horses to hay" was changed to 12½ cents.

Early Travel On Wilderness Road

Bishop Francis Asbury, whose trips over Boone's Trace have been related, returned to Kentucky over Governor Shelby's waggon road—The Wilderness Road—Oct. 30-31, 1800, making the trip in less than two days. His only over-night stop in the Wilderness was a Ballinger's on Cumberland river.

Returning from the Kentucky Conference in October, 1803, Bishop Asbury took the Madison road at Wood's—in the Woods: his house being unfinished, there were masons, and carpenters, and gentlemen, and riflemen, and whisky toppers, besides the gnats and bats, which ever and anon, flew in and out: we quitted our purgatory upon paying two and a half dollars for three of us." This was the night of Tuesday the 11th, probably somewhat south of Richmond, he being two days out of Lexington. Bishop Asbury's next entry brought him to and through Laurel county.

Stopped With John Farris, Sr. And John Freeman
"Wednesday, Oct. 12, 1803. It rained today. We encountered the rocks and hills, on the route to Rockcastle river, and stopped, dripping and willing, at Senior Farris's; here we had a fire, food, prayer, a room, and a bed. On Thursday we started and reached Richard Ballinger's; our host gave us entertainment gratis, and we had prayer at night and in the morning. I think seriously of forming a wilderness circuit; it is high time to begin." Two years go by, and then on "Oct. 10, 1805. Our

friend Johnson gave us lodging Thursday night; and at Rock Castle chance furnished us with another, such as it was, for Friday night, but we had peace and prayer."

"Saturday, Oct. 12, 1805. We took the path about five o'clock in the morning, and came eighteen miles to dinner at Mr. Freeman's. We reached Johnson's, upon Richmond Creek. On the Sabbath day we were under the necessity of moving forward slowly, to Ballinger's, where we dined. The evening brought us to Dalton's—crowded with company, but we kept good order."

A few days later, in Tennessee, after a perilous trip in the rain, over road "not better than in its native state," and his carriage being nearly upset at Clinch river, the Bishop "decided to take the Cumberland path hereafter" complaining "the turnpike takes fifty dollars a day for having made it worse."

But the Bishop kept coming back for more. We read in his journal where he spent "Thursday night, Oct. 8, 1807, at Freeman's—John Freeman's, at the old Freeman-Jackson homestead about five miles south of London. It doubtless was a difficult trip, for in Virginia the following Sunday, he reported, "I preached on Luke IV, 18. 'O, when shall this wilderness rejoice?' I have perfect peace, but great toil."

In 1809 he returned again, but my remaining notes taken several years ago have only about his return trip, which I presume was through Clay county. On Oct. 16: "Our way led through Richmond on Monday, and over the Long Hill: we pressed on to Dennis's—any port in a storm. A rough ride of fifteen miles, on Tuesday morning, brought us to Howard's: twenty years ago my kind host received me in Georgia. Another rough ride of twenty miles brought us, by moonshine, to Johnson's (Thomas Johnson, Revolutionary War veteran), where we were entertained like gentlemen. An early start on Wednesday morning gave us advantage of the day, and we came twenty miles to breakfast; we ate and prayed and went forward to Mr. White's (Revolutionary War veteran, grandfather of John D. White and ancestor of all the Clay county Whites), where we were comfortably lodged and entertained. (William White lived near Ferrandale on the Old State Road.) What is in parenthesis is by Elmer Decker, Hugh White, grandfather of John D. White, lived at that time at the mouth of Tan Yard Branch, "about a mile above the present town of Manchester," wrote Mrs. Bessie White Hager, a granddaughter, in the Register of the Kentucky Historical Society, July, 1952. I do not know the

connection with William White. Prayers Are Answered
Bishop Asbury's prayers had been answered, his work rewarded, even along this rough and difficult Wilderness Road, in the very Middle of the Wilderness, we find that, on Sept. 29th 1810, a Sr., with whom Bishop Asbury died was made to trustees, "for had found "a fire (on a cool rainy the use of the Methodist Episcopal Society: a "certain lot or piece of ground . . . on the waters of the Little Raccoon, whereon is a Patsy Farris, daughter of Johna-meeting house known by the name than McNeil, also one of the earl- Hopewell," in the first deed of best settlers in Laurel county.

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Magnificent Ruins Of The Wilderness Road



HENRY WARD
Commissioner of Conservation

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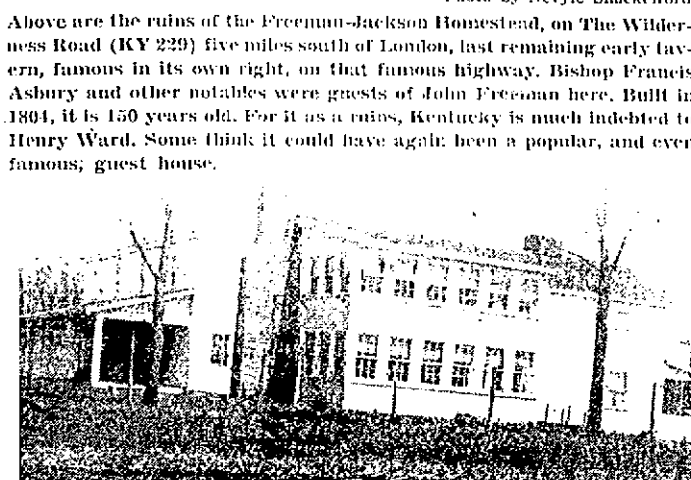
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Tributaries To Wilderness Road Established By Legislature

"The Kentucky Mountains", a Fork of Goose Creek, below the Filson Club publication, has been old Outlaw (Later the original quoted previously. This portion of White) salt works.

In an Act of 1858, establishing "the London, Somerset and Waltsborough (Head of navigation on the Cumberland river—Burnside) Turnpike Road Company," is this statement: "And as there are funds in the hand of Jarvis Jackson, of Laurel county, as a Commissioner, directed by act of General Assembly to be applied to the Kentucky at the time, and a most promising source of salt water on Laurel county, to the Cumberland the waters of Goose Creek in what river; and as the route contained is now Clay county. So an Act of . . . is the same . . . a Dec. 21, 1802, Miss Verhoeff tells considerable portion of distance us, established a road from Richmond in Madison county to the County Court of Laurel county, salt works on Goose creek owned shall have power, if it so desires, by John Patrick and others and to order an appropriation of known as Langford's Lick. This such portion of said fund" prorata was to the vicinity of present to this new venture. This possibly Manchester, turning off from the was the same "good" road, from main Richmond road near (south London and Somerset, that Dr. of) the Rockcastle river. The Act Christopher C. Graham has been credited with building to Sublimity Palaski Court House to the same Springs, which was incorporated as . . . Feb. 12, 1860.

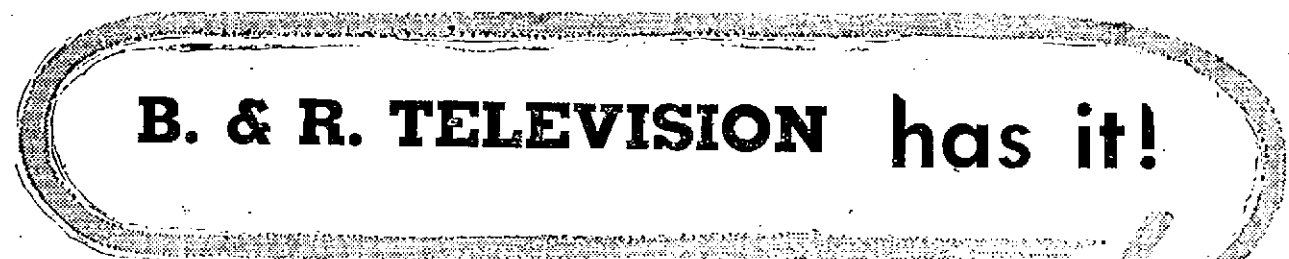
"By the close of the period," said Miss Verhoeff, "there were three main State roads, from the vicinity of Manchester, intersecting the Wilderness Road, which had been maintained by tollgates upon them or by tolls collected on the main road. One led via Burning Springs, Clay county, crossing the Madison road near (the) Hazel Patch (Via Mershons Cross Road and Windingblade road to north of new Hazelpatch on the Wilderness Road.) Another passed up Otter creek of Goose creek and down Stinking creek to Cumberland river. The third led to Somerset via London, with a branch passing through Raccoon Springs on (waters of Robinson creek, a tributary to) Laurel river. Besides roads leading to the salt works there were a number of other tributaries, local routes, which were given occasional aid. The most important of these extended to coal mines near the mouth of Laurel river, the head of descending navigation for coal barges on the Cumberland. (Coal barges were loaded up Rockcastle river to Sublimity Springs, just below the Narrows.) The opening of a road from London in Laurel

An Act of Jan. 31, 1810, established turnpikes (toll gates) for two years, and "no longer," because the roads were very bad, with but few inhabitants living near them. Both were built by Clay county and their lives were extended at least seven years by subsequent Legislatures. The more important was on the road from Madison and Lincoln counties to the lower lick, or Langford's. (From Lincoln county probably "the Windingblade road" to join the road from Madison at or beyond Mershons' Cross Roads.) The less important was on the road from "Hale's old place on Wilderness Road in Knox county" to the upper salt works (probably Outlaw's). From Hale's the road led to Ephraim Moore's on Lyan Camp creek, and on to Mouth of Laurel river. Feb. 16, 1808, a road was ordered from the Knox County Court House to intersect with road from Langford's to the Palaski County House at or near Benjamin Thurman's.

Jan. 12, 1842, a road was ordered from Mouth of Rockcastle river passing through London, to Daniel Bates' salt furnace on Collins

(Continued on Page D-6)

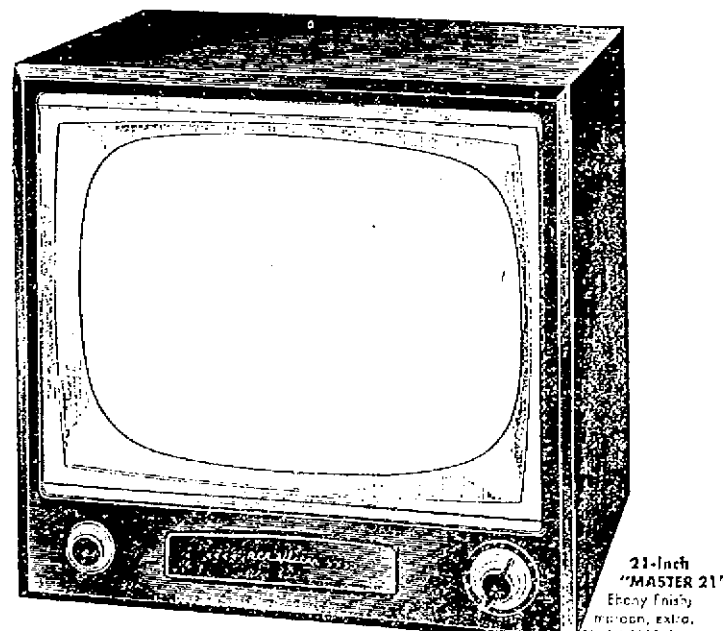
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