

GREATER JEFFERSONTOWN
Historical Society Newsletter

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February 2012 Meeting

The February meeting will be **Monday, February 6, 2011**. We will meet at 7:00 P.M. in the meeting room of the Jeffersontown Library at 10635 Watterson Trail. The Greater Jeffersontown Historical Society meetings are now held on the first Monday of the even numbered months of the year. Everyone is encouraged to attend to help guide and grow the Society.

Anne Bader's Corn Island Archeology has been doing research on Mansfield, the home of Henry Watterson in Jeffersontown. Mr. Watterson found the Louisville *Courier-Journal* in 1868 by buying and combining the *Louisville Courier* and the *Louisville Journal*. The house, located on Watterson Trail, burned in the 1980s after failed attempts to preserve it. Corn Island Archeology has been researching the house, as well as the farm where Watterson spent so many happy days.

April Meeting

Bob Dawson will present "Where Was Manslick, And Why Did So Many Roads Go There?" - A history of one of Kentucky's first industries, and why it was so important to the early settlement of Jefferson County.

Bob Dawson has always been interested in history in general and local history in particular. He is a member of the Louisville Historical League, the Louisville Chapter of the National Railroad Historical Society, and the Louisville and Nashville Historical Society. He retired from the 100th Division (IT), U.S. Army Reserve, as a Command Sergeant Major, and the Louisville Gas & Electric Company where he spent many years in the Maps and Records Section, and retired as a Health and Safety Specialist. He has presented programs to various Railroad Historical Societies, the Middletown Historical Society and at the Louisville Public Library, Iroquois Branch.

In Memoriam

I'm sure everyone locally knows by now, but just in case our out-of-town members don't know. Daniel H. Ruckriegel, a GJHS member, passed away December 22, 2011 at his residence. He served as Jeffersontown Mayor for nearly two decades, was past president of the Kentucky League of Cities, worked with the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet and the Kentuckiana Regional Planning and Development Agency and was currently serving on the Jeffersontown City Council. Danny was an electrician and started the Ruckriegel Electric Company. He was a captain as a volunteer on the Jeffersontown Fire Department, a Kentucky Colonel, and a lifetime member of the Jeffersontown Chamber of Commerce. Danny was 70 years old.

Cherry Springs/Funk House

If you haven't notice the Funk House has a new tenant but the same business. Does anyone know if Michael Gordon still owns the property or he had to sell or whatever? Let me know.

The Alexander Hamilton Society

The Alexander Hamilton Society of Kentucky is sponsoring a symposium on the U.S. Constitution on February 18 at the University of Louisville Belknap Campus Ekstrom Library. See the attached flyer. Also, they are celebrating the bicentennial of the War of 1812 all this

year. They meet on the third Saturday of the month at the Eline-St. Matthews Library. The next meeting will be March 17 when Dr. William Nash will present a program based on the book *1812 The War That Forged a Nation* by Walter Borneman.

December 2011 Meeting

Charlie Arrington presented "The Stations On Beargrass: The American Frontier In 1780," an audio-visual program tracing the Middle Fork of Beargrass Creek through its transition from Indian hunting grounds to pioneer settlements. Settlers built fort-like structures called stations along the creek, which runs through the eastern part of Jefferson County. Among these were Spring Station, Floyd's Station, Low Dutch, A'Sturgus Station, and Linn's Station. Structures from some of these locations still exist. This program covers about a dozen years when pioneer families were in near constant conflict with Indians and the elements. "Stations On Beargrass" was narrated by Tom Owen and written by the late George Yater, both local historians. Tom is a Louisville Metro Councilman. The Beargrass-St. Matthews Historical Society originally produced the program in the 1980s with a grant from the Kentucky Humanities Council.

The Middle Fork of Beargrass Creek in the summer of 1780 was lined by willow tree groves great sycamores, cottonwoods, elms, oaks, and hickories that made up the forests that stretched almost unbroken from the Atlantic coast. The creek was populated by thousands of beaver, otter and badger. There were numerous beaver dams along the creek and the largest were in the Middle Fork, one was fourteen feet high. Around the beaver ponds grew a tall bamboo-like cane grass that was food for the great herds of buffalo and later domesticated cattle of the first settlers. This was the land around the Beargrass that was known by the Native Americans for centuries, who had fished its waters and hunted the surrounding land for the abundant game. They had lived in parts of Kentucky at one time, but by the middle of the 1700s they moved north to join their tribesmen beyond the Ohio River. The Indians would return to Kentucky seasonally to hunt and fish. Large areas were needed to support the food needs of the tribes in what would become Ohio. But after the spring of 1778, these lands were invaded by intruders who would take the Indians' land and change the forests of plenty forever.

In that spring of 1778, George Rogers Clark would lead a band of militia and settlers down the Ohio to Corn Island at the Falls of the Ohio. Clark was going to take the militia on to southern Illinois that like Kentucky, was claimed by the state of Virginia. He was convinced that a strike into that area would discourage the Indians from raiding into Kentucky. Corn Island was just downstream from where the Beargrass emptied into the Ohio at a point that is located on the riverfront between Third and Fourth Streets.

When the success of Clark's raid into Illinois was learned back east, it signaled that Kentucky was safe to settle and the spigot was opened. Forays up the Middle Fork became common as hunters sought meat for the Corn Island settlement and settlers made tomahawk claims of 400 acres as allowed by Virginia land law. What many settlers either didn't know or just ignored were prior claims of great quantities of land, some 37,000 acres in 1,000 to 6,000 acre plots, in much of eastern Jefferson County. These were land grants awarded to Virginia officers who had served with the British in the French and Indian War in the late 1750s.

John Floyd, who had helped survey the region in 1774, had not served in the 1750s war but purchased two 1,000-acre plots along the Middle Fork of Beargrass Creek from two Virginia military officers who did serve. The land encompassed the present day downtown St. Matthews and stretched past what is now the Watterson Expressway, I-264. Breckinridge Lane now runs through the heart of his plot. Floyd had surveyed much of the area that would become Jefferson County in 1774 for William Preston (Preston St. is named for him), and decided that if he returned, the Middle Fork of the Beargrass was where he wanted to be. When Floyd learned of

Clark's success in Illinois, he joined the people coming through the Cumberland Gap and returned to this area. He brought his brother, two sisters and their spouses, his wife and their infant son with him in November of 1779, driving some cattle in front of them. He found eleven squatter cabins in various places on his extensive tract. The squatters would have to become tenants or move on.

He built a house along the creek close to where it now crosses Breckinridge Lane. An essential spring was nearby. The springhouse was still standing in 1922, but by 1957 it had been pretty much destroyed. The city of St. Matthews rebuilt it and it is the only remaining historical structure on what is left of the property. The Middle Fork runs between the Home Depot Store and The Springs Medical Center.

About the same time farther up the creek, William Linn, an experienced frontiersman, one of the settlers from Pittsburgh who had come to Corn Island in 1778 and joined in Clark's foray into Illinois, entered his claim for 400 acres in accordance with Virginia land law. It was granted in early 1780. It was described as "lying in the dry run of the creek to where the said Linn now lives." This is the dry fork of the eastern most reaches of Beargrass Creek that runs through parts of the Hurstbourne Country Club golf course and into Plainview east of Hurstbourne Lane. That puts Linn's grant near Soldier's Retreat, the great stone house built by Richard C. Anderson in 1793. Leroy Highbaugh, Jr. rebuilt that house on the original site in the 1970s. A letter written by one of Anderson's sons in 1891 describes Linn's Station as being less than a half-mile from Soldier's Retreat. One branch of Dry Run runs south from Soldier's Retreat for about half a mile, and the other into Plainview, so Linn's Station was on one of these branches and near Hurstbourne Lane.

In the 1780s the stream of settlers coming down the Ohio turned into a torrent. They came down in wooden flatboats called Kentucky boats. Floyd at one time wrote "this spring 300 large boats had arrived with families and we have six stations along the Beargrass with at least 600 men." Ten to fifteen wagons at a time every day would go to and from the Falls carrying families and corn.

The migration of settlers to Kentucky slowed when it became obvious the British and the Indians had recovered from Clark's strike into Illinois in 1778, but the flow of settlers didn't stop. By 1780 the war on the western frontier had intensified. Not only did the Indians resent the settlers coming into their hunting grounds, also they were spurred into attacking by the British as part of the American Revolution and the six settlements, called stations, along the Beargrass were in the thick of it. They were Spring (1780), Floyd (1779), Low Dutch (1780), A'Sturgus (Floyd's brother-in-law, 1780), and Linn (1779), which are shown on John Filson's famous 1784 map of Kentucky. The sixth, Hogland Station (1780), between Spring and Floyd Stations, and about 2,000 feet west of Floyd Station, was left off the map. It was located on or near the site that is now the Big Springs Clubhouse. Closest to the Falls was Spring Station near a stately home in Cherokee Gardens built in 1795 by Samuel Beal, for whom Beal's Branch of Beargrass Creek is named. The stockade at Spring Station may have been built by Samuel Beal.

The A'Sturgus station passed through several hands and was already known as Oxmoor when Alexander Bullitt became master of the estate in 1787.

The most unusual station, as far as its inhabitants were concerned, was the Low Dutch. It was located on the south side of the Middle Fork a bit west of what is now Browns Lane. The overgrown site is opposite the south end of Browns Park. The settlement was founded by a group of Pennsylvania Germans of Dutch descent, who arrived at the Falls in the spring of 1780 intent on finding a large tract of land where they could all settle together. All were members of

the Dutch Reformed Church and although the station was called Low Dutch, the settlers called it New Holland.

These stations served, as more than places of refuge when the Indians were on the prowl, they were inns for travelers and places of commercial trade. They were rectangular log forts made up with about thirty cabins facing inward with small openings on the outside walls for riflemen to fend off Indian attacks. Inhabitants of the forts would rent cabins inside the forts from the station owner and sometimes they had to pay nothing since the presence of a fort made it easier to rent agricultural land to farmers.

The stations proved essential in the warfare that quickly spread along the Beargrass. Floyd wrote to William Preston in the spring of 1780 that hardly a week passed that someone wasn't scalped between his station and the Falls of the Ohio. The Indians were determined to make the season difficult. Even though the forts provided safety, life became weary when large numbers of settlers were gathered together for days, sometimes weeks at a time. Daniel Trabue described in his book *Westward into Kentucky*, how the settlers looked wild after being cooped up inside the fort. The women would walk about the fort looking like they didn't know what they were about, but would encourage one another and hope for the best. There were no sanitary facilities and many times more than one family would be crowded into a small cabin. Floyd described it as the air losing its purity and sweetness and a type of flux was common from living in the dirt and filth from the crowded conditions. Flux was the 18th century term for diarrhea.

But the stations were a fact of life for the next four to five years. It was a monotonous existence. Terrifying Indian attacks on the forts and settler reprisal attacks to the Indian villages in Ohio to the north were constant, leaving widows on both sides of the river. None of the stations were besieged, but were targets of small bands of Indians waylaying travelers, attacking lone settlers, stealing horses, burning deserted cabins, and taking hostages. John Dial, a guard at one of the forts said a woman wouldn't go forty yards from the fort to pick beans without a guard. John Floyd stopped using the road along the Beargrass, instead made his way stealthily through the woods to go to the Falls. Other traveled only at night when they presented a less visible target.

The most terrifying year was 1781 when the British persuaded the Indians to attack Fort Nelson at the Falls and the stations along the Beargrass. In March William Linn had been killed along Beargrass Creek on what is now the Hurstbourne Country Club golf course. He was on his way to attend the first session of the court of the newly formed Jefferson County. The constant scribbler Floyd recorded that by April of that year forty-seven people of this county had been killed or captured by Indians since the first of January. By September the feared invasion by British led Indians came as close as eastern Jefferson County at Long Run Park. There the invasion force came upon settlers fleeing a station established near what is now Shelbyville by Squire Boone, Daniel's brother. The settlers had seen Indian signs and were making their way to Linn Station for safety in numbers. The encounter became known as the Long Run Massacre with a death toll of seven or so. When the survivors reached Linn's Station, John Floyd, by then the commander of the county militia, gathered a force to bury the dead and pursue the attackers. The result of the pursuit was even bloodier than the massacre. Floyd's force of twenty-six men rode right into an Indian ambush. Seventeen men were killed. Floyd's horse was shot out from under him and he was wounded. Samuel Wells gave up his horse for the wounded commander and ran along side him. A monument was erected near Eastwood in 1880 to commemorate the fallen pioneers. The Long Run massacre and the defeat of Floyd was a severe blow to the morale of the settlers in Jefferson County. The daughter of a man named Kimble recalled Floyd speaking sadly about the events to her father, "worse and worse Mister Kimble, worse and worse." Floyd showed more discouragement in a letter he wrote, stating he feared their destruction was inevitable.

There is little doubt that Jefferson County and maybe all of Kentucky may have been abandoned, except for the defeat of the British at Yorktown. The surrender was followed by an armed truce while a peace treaty was negotiated. Indian warfare soon diminished, as British officers no longer led attacks into Kentucky, even though the Indians still had their grievances. In 1782 they infiltrated the little group of stations around Bullitt's Lick near present day Shepherdsville where salt was made, taking thirty-seven prisoners in one attack. The attacks became more nuisance attacks by small wandering parties, than attacks by war parties. They were losing the battle for Kentucky on sheer numbers. White man losses were constantly be replenished and added, while Indian numbers continued to fall. Food game became scarcer and the buffalo herds, once plentiful in Kentucky, had disappeared before the white man's guns by 1790.

In 1783 John Floyd felt so much more confident in the future of Kentucky that he built the first brick house in Jefferson County. He no longer skulked through the woods, but used the roads to move around until the fateful day in April 1783 while on his way to a militia review at Bullitt's Lick, Floyd and his companions were ambushed. Floyd's wounds were fatal. John Thixton's daughter recalled the tragedy. Colonel Sam Wells got back with the news to Mrs. Floyd who took the report very hard but got a group of men together to bring John home. He was buried with the honors of war. His grave is on a grassy knoll above the Middle Fork behind the Jamestown Apartments on Breckinridge Lane. The Filson Club provided a new grave marker in the 1970s. Floyd's widow later married Alexander Breckinridge after whom Breckinridge Lane is named.

In 1785 William Christian decided to bring his family to the Beargrass to settle on the two thousand acres he in Floyd's 1774 survey. The peace treaty ending the American Revolution had been signed two years earlier and surely Kentucky was safe now. But he found that at least the Beargrass was not. He lived at the A'Sturgus Station at what is now the Oxmoor Shopping Center parking lot and is marked by the usual springhouse. He was going to build his house on land north of Shelbyville Road, but found it would lie in the path Indians used for incursions from the Ohio River. Of a station on Floyd's Fork Christian wrote they had seven families and two of the men had been killed in three weeks time. The following April in 1786 a small plundering band of Indians stole several of Christian's horses. Determined to recover his property he gathered a group of men from the A'Sturgus Station and pursued the Indians across the river. They caught up with the Indians about a mile north of present day Jeffersonville. They retrieved the horses but in the fight Christian was killed. He was buried near A'Sturgus Station and was probably the first burial in what was to become the Bullitt family cemetery at Oxmoor.

The last Indian attack on any fort on the Beargrass occurred in 1789, when Chenoweth Station was attacked with a death toll of five. Peggy Chenoweth was scalped and left for dead. She survived and crawled to the springhouse where, as the story goes, Col. Richard Anderson, the owner of Soldier's Retreat, found her. He took her back to his home where she recovered and wore a dainty lace cap on her head the rest of her life to cover her hairless head.

In 1790 construction began on Locust Grove, the home where George Rogers Clark lived out the remainder of his days with his sister and brother-in-law. The Georgian architecture was more tidewater Virginia, but was a sign of what was to come for Jefferson County.

Jefferson County now free of marauding Indians had come a long way in the violent and bloody twelve years since the first settlers landed on Corn Island. There is no record of when each of the stations on the Beargrass ceased to exist. They had served their purpose in a life and death struggle between two radically different cultures and just slowly decayed. The new order was

farming that plowed the old remnants into the ground. By 1800 the Beargrass area came to be known as the garden of Kentucky.

After the narrated program ended Charlie Arrington followed up with what he called “Stations on the Beargrass – A 21st Century Look.” He had ridden on his bicycle to photograph four of the six stations sites. Beargrass Creek has had several names of the two hundred years. Besides Beargrass it has been called Rotten Creek; the French called it the great obstacle. Beargrass emptied into the Ohio at about 2nd or 3rd streets. The Ohio River was much narrower then, and the Beargrass carried a lot more water, especially during floods and heavy rains, which would make it difficult to cross where it emptied into the river. And in the early days everything was thrown into it. It was a sewer. When animals were slaughtered the remains would be tossed into the creek and because of that the creek added the name Bloody Creek. Charlie thought is ironic that today Jefferson County is under an EPA cleanup decree because streams are so “polluted” now.

The creek was a road through the region, most of the time probably too shallow and narrow to move a canoe, it did have along its banks natural shelter areas in the rock ledges that are still there in Cherokee Park and other areas as Charlie showed in his photographs.

The site of Spring Station is near the intersection of Lexington Road and Cannons Lane, off Trinity Road. The Beal House, now called the Charlton House sits here, renovated many times. It has two springhouses on the property, only one of which is thought to be original. The spring still flows quite nicely down the hill and empties into the Beargrass.

Floyd Station is off Breckinridge Lane, behind the Jamestown apartments just north of the Springs Shopping and Medical Center. There are road markers on the west side of Breckinridge Lane. Going north you have to turn left just past the apartment complex and turn left again to get back to the small park. You will find Floyd’s and Robert Breckinridge’s graves and what is left of the old springhouse and a reconstructed stonewall around them.

Low Dutch Station is at the south end of Browns Park next to Baptist Hospital East on Kresge Way.

A’Sturgus Station was located on the Bullitt property at Oxmoor Center just across the access road behind the Kohl’s Department Store. The restored Bullitt home and springhouse is still there and the Bullitt cemetery is at the intersection of the main west access road going around Oxmoor Center and the access road going back to Kohl’s. It is thought by some that the Bullitt home is one of the oldest, if not the oldest home, in Jefferson County.

The Louisville map of 1818 did not have any of the stations noted on it.

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