

Kentucky

April 2005
Kentucky Humanities Council Inc.

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Kentucky Bloodlines *page 9*

Henry Clay was a farmer as well as a statesman. An exhibit at the Kentucky Horse Park celebrates his family's contributions to the horse business.

Blood Trail *page 3*

In 1798-99, the Harpe brothers left an appalling trail of bodies across the Commonwealth.

Coal Country of My Heart *page 22*

A memoir of life in the western Kentucky coalfields sixty years ago.

Plus:

The Poet Laureate
Bar Stories
Kentucky's Holocaust Survivors

Kentucky Chautauqua

Bringing history to life includes discovering Kentuckians whose stories have not been widely told, but need to be.

Kentucky Chautauqua, the Kentucky Humanities Council's ever-popular living history program, takes great pride in introducing Kentuckians to fellow citizens who were remarkable but not famous. One of the best examples is Anna Mac Clarke, who made history in the military. This memorable young woman grew up in Lawrenceburg and graduated from Kentucky State College in 1941. Rejecting domestic work—the only job a black college graduate could get in Lawrenceburg in those days—she packed up and moved to New York to work at a Girl Scout Camp. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor in December 1941, she recalled the words of her commencement speaker at Kentucky State a few months before. The great educator Mary McCloud Bethune had told the graduates, “We must not fail America, and as Americans, we must insist that America not fail us.”

Clarke took that statement to heart, both parts of it. She enlisted in the Women's Army Corps (WAC) and reported to Ft. Des Moines, Iowa for officer training. She graduated in 1943, the only black in her class. At Ft. Des Moines, Clarke led a successful protest against the army's proposal to form an all-black WAC regiment, but segregation and discrimination still reigned. Black soldiers, for example, were allowed to use the base swimming pool for only one hour a week, just before it was cleaned.

**Anna Mac Clarke
died only a month
after her historic
protest. She was 24.**

Such indignities were no doubt fresh in Clarke's mind when she reported for duty at Douglas Army Airfield in Arizona. At Douglas, Lt. Clarke cut a wide swath. She made history by becoming the first black WAC officer to command white troops. Then, because she wanted to watch a movie with those troops, she refused to sit in the “Reserved for Negroes” section in the



Lt. Clarke at work: Haley Bowling as Anna Mac Clarke during a performance at the Carnegie Center for Literacy and Learning in Lexington.

base theater. After the military police escorted her out, she took her case to the base commander, Col. Harvey E. Dyer, who responded by banning segregation at Douglas. That was national news. The larger effect of Clarke's protest and Dyer's order is difficult to assess, but in a very few years the military became one of the first major institutions in American life to be desegregated. Anna Mac Clarke died of complications from a ruptured appendix only a month after her historic protest. She was 24.

Anna Mac Clarke's life was tragically short, but her refusal to accept second-class treatment made a real impact. And Haley Bowling's vivid portrayal of Clarke for Kentucky Chautauqua has made a real impact on those who have seen it. “New and exciting information,” wrote one audience member. “Perfect presentation.” Visit our web site—kyhumanities.org—for a schedule of Chautauqua performances near you. You'll see what we mean when we say we're Telling Kentucky's Story.



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Mark Sohn took the photographs on pages 18 and 20 of the October 2004 issue of *Kentucky Humanities*.

Curious Namings

Ever heard of Disputanta?

For many years one of the smallest incorporated places in Kentucky has been the sixth class Crittenden County city of Dycusburg. The 2000 Census counted only thirty-nine residents. Obviously it was named for a local family, but why and how?

Officially this place, at the junction of KY 70, 295, and 902, 11 and a half air miles south-southwest of Marion (the county seat), was laid out by William F. Dycus on land then owned by G.B. Dycus, its first settler. It was incorporated on February 3, 1847, got its post office as Dycusburg on November 7, 1848, and soon became an important lower Cumberland River shipping port.

According to county historian Braxton McDonald, however, two families actually vied for the honor of naming the new town. These were the Cookseys and the Dycuses. Now there was, at the town site, a large spring, and another spring a short walking distance above. A member of the committee meeting to decide on the name suggested that all who wanted this place to be called Dycusburg proceed to the spring by the river, and all who wanted it called Cookseyville go up to the other spring. It's said that the leader of the Dycusburg faction weighed over 400 pounds, and on that cold day was wearing a large overcoat with bulging pockets. When the factions were ready to leave for their respective springs, the big man turned his back to the crowd. Four bottles of whiskey were noticeable in his pockets as he walked over to his spring, and nearly everyone followed him.

Now, the people who tell this story can't, or won't, quite vouch for its truth. They certainly won't say that Mr. Dycus

had any intention of sharing his whiskey with anyone, or even realized that he had those bottles in his pockets.

One of the most popular folk etymologies in the country, one that's been heard to account for places in California, Pennsylvania, Kentucky, and possibly elsewhere, refers to the collective response to the suggestions of a local place-naming committee. When the folks of a certain Russell County locality got together one night to select their new post office name, a number of offerings were shouted out by individuals. To each the assemblage

Four bottles of whiskey were noticeable in his pockets as he walked over to his spring, and nearly everyone followed him.

responded with an "Oh, no!" Finally, when too many of the suggestions had been voted down this way and it was getting late, someone suggested they name the place Ono, for that seemed to be all they could agree on. Makes a good story, doesn't it? Actually, we don't know why the place got the name, as other such named places did, from at least two biblical passages (1st Chronicles 8:12 and Nehemiah 6:2) referring to the plains of Ono.

Similarly, folks in a small Todd County hamlet spent all day trying to come up with a suitable name. Anxious to end it all and go home, someone suggested that "we all agree on something." And they did. They called it Allagree. That name was offered to the Post Office Department, which dropped the final "e," and the local office

was called this till it recently closed. This story is still told by folks who prefer it to the alternative—crediting William Allegree, a local schoolteacher.

Sometimes, when the members of a naming committee simply can't agree and their deliberations threaten to get out of hand, there's a risk the place will ever remain nameless. Until it closed in 1884, the post office serving the Reids' tannery on northeastern Rockcastle County's Clear Creek was called Reidsville. Two years later the office would be reestablished. When neither of the local factions would give in to the other, cooler heads brought their dispute to a disinterested third party, probably one D.N. Williams. He suggested they name the place Disputanta, and they did.

Some Kentucky places are named for the full name of a local resident or for two (or more) persons the namers wish to honor. This has often confused and sometimes even embarrassed visitors to our state. Back in the days before there were bus stations with ticket windows, passengers would purchase their tickets as they

boarded the vehicle. This they'd do by telling the driver where they wanted to go. Young George Allen was taking his first bus ride. Unsure of what to do, he observed what the passengers ahead of him did as they boarded the bus. The first person said "Betsy Layne"; the next mentioned "Julia Bow"; the third said "Mary Alice"; the fourth said "Arthurmable"; the fifth "Bob White"; the sixth "Marydell"; then "Mary Helen", "Johnetta", "Jim Wood", and "Jonancy." Our boy, not knowing any better, said "George Allen." He was let off at the next stop. 🍷

Robert M. Rennick is coordinator of the Kentucky Place Names Survey

In 1798-99, two outlaws terrorized the Kentucky frontier. From Cumberland Gap to Henderson County, the homicidal Harpe brothers left a trail of bodies that was appalling even by the violent standards of the time.

Blood Trail

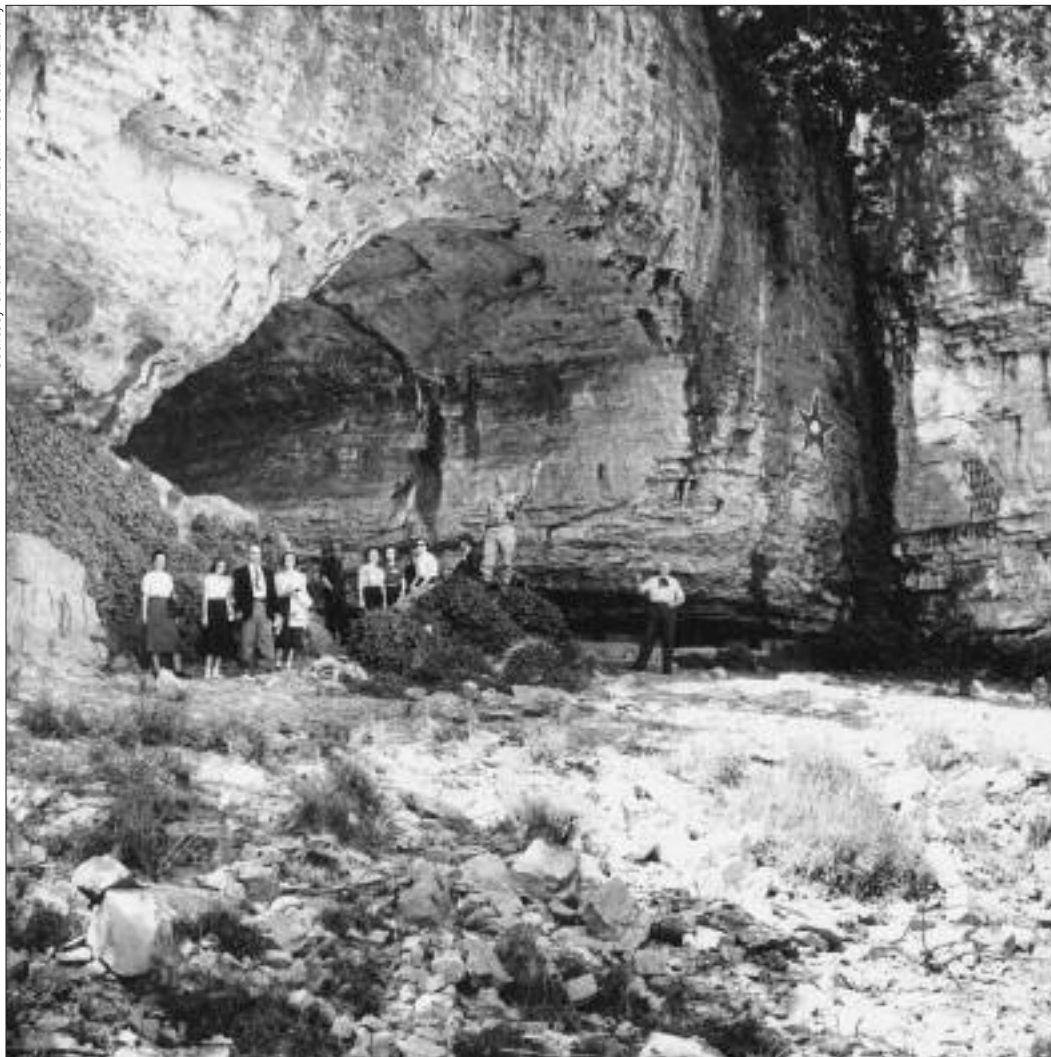
Mass Murder on the Kentucky Frontier

The pioneers who settled the Kentucky frontier were no strangers to death. Yet throughout the spring and summer of 1799 many who calmly braved the terrors of the wilderness were gripped with fear. The dreaded Indian war cry had long symbolized the danger that lay beyond the cabin door. However, the discovery of a growing number of mangled bodies marked a more chilling threat—a danger from within.

Like the horrific shape-shifters of legend, two outlaws haunted the dark forests and lonely wilderness trails. They posed as ragged pilgrims, pious circuit riders, or vigilantes before dispatching their unwary victims with savage fury. Wiley and Micajah Harpe were American originals whose bloody deeds foreshadowed the crimes of modern serial killers.

Cave-in-Rock, an Illinois cave overlooking the Ohio River opposite Crittenden County, Kentucky, was a notorious haunt for river pirates. Though no strangers to robbery and murder, the pirates found the Harpe brothers so disgusting they drove them back to Kentucky.

Courtesy of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library



Most accounts describe the Harpes as brothers, North Carolina natives whose Tory family was uprooted during the Revolution and driven into the wilderness. Yet their true identities may never be known. All that can be stated with certainty is that both were clearly the malevolent offspring of the dark, brutal side of the Southern frontier.

Indeed, the frontier had long been a refuge for desperate men. Organized bands of outlaws prowled the Southern back country long before the American Revolution. America's seven-year struggle for independence sparked a savage civil war in the South that bred further violence and disorder. Those who fought for the King were ostracized after the conflict. Many moved west to seek a new life on the frontier. Others refused to lay down their arms and followed the outlaw trail.

Still others sought refuge with the King's staunch allies, the Creeks and Cherokees, who continued to wage war

By 1797 the Harpes, claiming to hail from Georgia, settled near Knoxville, Tennessee. The newcomers built a cabin, raised a crop and soon went courting. On June 1, 1797 Wiley, or Willie, believed to be in his late twenties or early thirties, married Sarah "Sally" Rice, who by all accounts was a pretty young woman from a respectable Knox County family. Not to be outdone, Micajah, reportedly in his early to mid-thirties, brought two women home. One was Susannah Roberts, whom he legally married in neighboring Blount County on September 5, 1797. The other was Betsy, his new bride's sister. Both women shared household chores and Big Harpe's bed (Wiley was called Little Harpe).

Although it was the capital of the recently formed state of Tennessee, Knoxville was a wild frontier town filled with rough, lawless characters. The Harpes frequently passed the time drinking, gambling and brawling. They also

burned the stables of Knoxville's founder, James White, in an unsuccessful effort to steal his fine horses. Shortly afterwards they created a diversion by burning the stables of Col. David Henley, Indian agent for the U.S. War Department. When citizens ran toward the blaze, the Harpes boldly slipped into Knoxville and attempted to rob the home of Gov. John Sevier himself. The Knox County militia frequently pursued the outlaws only to lose their trail in the rugged mountains.

By late 1798 the Harpes had become notorious along the Tennessee-North Carolina border. It was apparently during this period that the Rev. William Lambuth, traveling alone through the wilderness between Knoxville and Nashville, had a brush with death. The little Methodist circuit rider had camped for the night when he was awakened by his startled horse. As he related from the pulpit for years afterwards, he was frozen by the sight of Big Harpe emerging from the blackness beyond the camp fire.

The big man pounced like a tiger and threatened to kill Lambuth unless he surrendered his money and horse. Harpe's tone softened when he seized Lambuth's Bible. He noted a scrawled reference to George Washington on the flyleaf and muttered, "That is a brave and good man, but a mighty rebel against the King!" Once he realized his victim was a man of cloth, the outlaw set him free. Just before he disappeared into the darkness, he turned and roared, "We are the Harpes!"

Lambuth lived to tell of his encounter with the Harpes. Many others were not as fortunate. During the same period the Harpes seized a Hawkins County resident named Johnson in a rough tavern near Knoxville. Days later Johnson's body, gutted and filled with stones, was found in the Holston River. This grisly manner of disposing of their victim's remains would become their murderous trademark.

By late 1798, Tennessee had become too dangerous for the Harpes. With their women in tow, the outlaws set out for Kentucky on the old Wilderness Trail. Big Harpe's father-in-law, "Old Man Roberts," had reportedly preceded them and settled in Green County. The party soon overtook

Several days later Johnny Trabue's dismembered body was found scattered in a sinkhole. The Harpes had literally butchered the boy for a sack of flour.

against their old foes long after Yorktown. Antebellum Kentucky historian T. Marshall Smith wrote that the Harpes were among the renegade whites who fought with the Chickamauga faction of the Cherokees, whose towns were clustered around present-day Chattanooga. He also maintained that the brothers participated in the 1794 Titsworth massacre in present-day Robertson County, Tennessee.

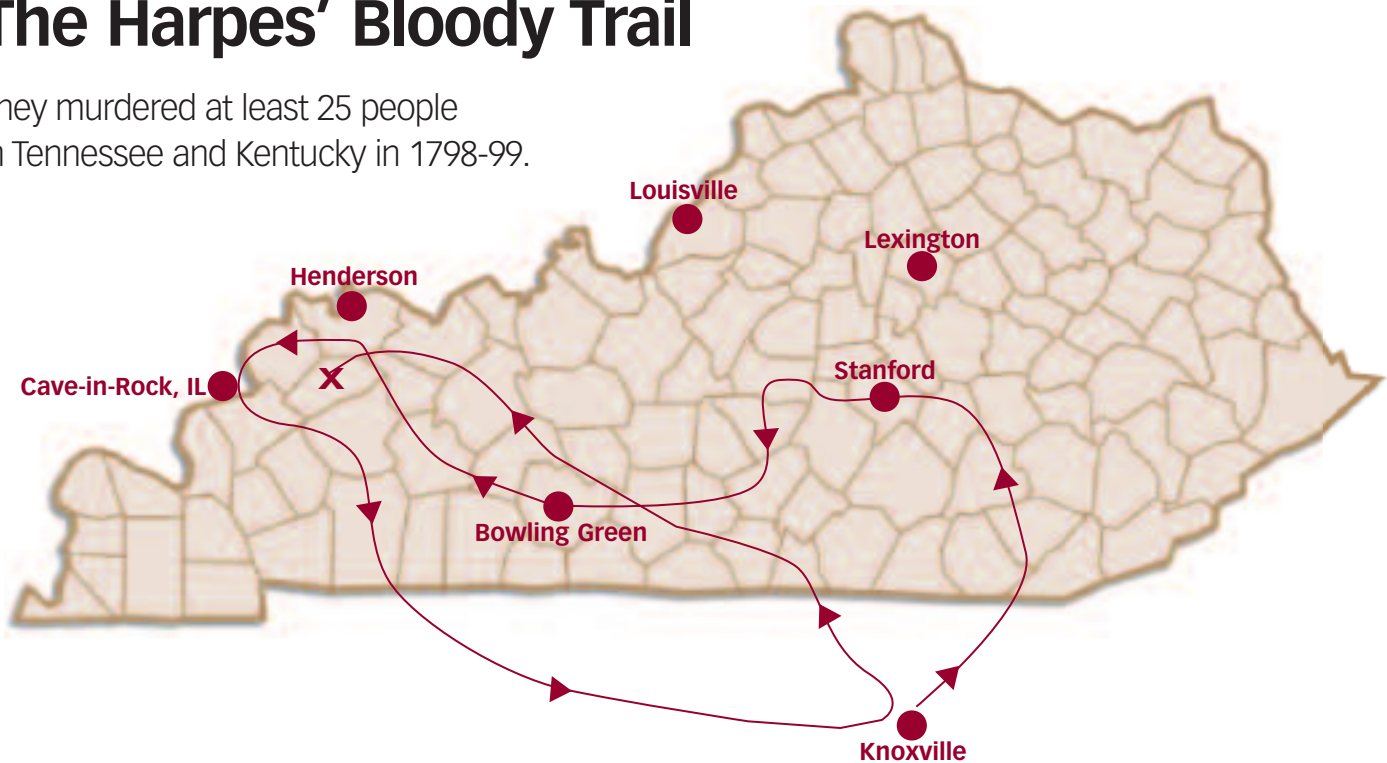
According to Smith, the Harpes were cast adrift when a force of Tennessee and Kentucky militia destroyed their haven at Nickajack, one of the Chickamauga towns, on September 12, 1794. This defeat helped bring the Chickamaugas to terms, and by 1796 both the Creeks and Cherokees had ceased to raid the settlements for "hair and horses." However, the Harpes continued to prey on their old foes—not from without but within.

roamed the region stealing horses and running off stock. The turning point apparently came in the late summer or fall of 1798 when one Edward Tiel tracked his missing horses to the Harpe place. The cabin was deserted but Tiel and his companions followed a fresh trail northward across the Clinch River into the Cumberland mountains. Overtaken with the stolen horses, the Harpes surrendered quietly. However, horse stealing was a capital offense on the frontier, and the outlaws escaped before the party reached Knoxville.

Most men would have fled into the wilderness. The Harpes, however, seemed to regard their arrest as a declaration of war. They frequently lurked about Knoxville and sought vengeance against the town's elite. They

The Harpes' Bloody Trail

They murdered at least 25 people in Tennessee and Kentucky in 1798-99.



a solitary peddler named Peyton near the Cumberland River in present day Knox County. The lone traveler was swiftly robbed and murdered.

Moving northward the outlaws fell in with two travelers from Maryland known only as Paca and Bates. The Harpes persuaded their next victims to join forces for better safety on the trail. As night approached, the merciless pair slipped behind the Marylanders, leveled their rifles and shot them from their horses. Bates hit the ground dead but Paca had to be finished off by Big Harpe's tomahawk. Weeks later a body bearing multiple head wounds, perhaps the ill-fated Paca, was discovered off the trail in the waters of Robinson Creek in present day Laurel County.

Travelers along the Wilderness Trail had long feared death by roving bands of Cherokees. Indeed, Lyman Draper's 1842 sketch of the Harpes states that the brothers were with the ferocious Chickamauga chief Doublehead when he butchered a party of ministers on the road in 1794. With the deaths of Peyton, Paca and Bates, it seemed that the Harpes, like the Cherokees before them, had declared war on the people of the Kentucky frontier.

On the night of December 11, 1798, the Harpes, with their ragged women trudging behind them, rode up to John Farris's tavern near Hazel Patch in present day Rockcastle County. They were accompanied by Thomas Lankford, a young Virginian making his way to the Kentucky settlements. As the party prepared to resume their trek on the 12th, the Harpes and Lankford quarreled. According to some accounts the Harpes rudely bickered over the price of their breakfast and Lankford, disgusted by their behavior, paid for the meal. An eyewitness afterwards related that Lankford told Mrs. Farris that "he would not offend her for all in his saddle bags which was worth five hundred pounds."

Those words sealed the Virginian's fate. Two days later, on December 14th, cattle drovers found bits of human skull and mangled flesh in the road near the Big Rockcastle River. They searched the nearby woods and found Lankford's body concealed behind a fallen log. Based on original court records, it appears Lankford was swiftly dispatched by a shattering tomahawk blow to the right temple at a spot about ten miles beyond Farris's tavern.

The Harpes were immediately suspected of the crime and Captain "Devil Joe" Ballenger of Stanford led a posse in hot pursuit. The killers were overtaken near present day Hustonville on Christmas day. Jailed in Stanford, the entire party was formally charged with murder by the Lincoln County Court of Quarter Sessions on January 4, 1799. The prisoners, who gave their names as Wiley and Micajah "Roberts," were afterwards confined in Danville in old Mercer County where they and their wives would be tried at the spring term of the District Court.

All three Harpe women were pregnant at the time of their capture. Betsy and Susannah bore a daughter and son respectively for Big Harpe that winter. However, the new father and father-to-be did not linger long with their growing families. On March 16, 1799 the Harpes broke out of jail, seized two rifles and fled southward toward old Green County.

Once again Capt. Joseph Ballenger led the chase, overtaking the killers near the headwaters of Rolling Fork in present-day Marion County. What happened next reveals the demonic aura that allowed the Harpes to plant fear in the bravest hearts. The outlaws boldly faced

the posse and dared them to fight. Little Harpe, despite his small stature, exuded the same ferocity that burned in the eyes of his older brother, who stood well over six feet tall. Ballenger's men locked eyes with their human prey, and slowly fell back. The Harpes hurled curses at them and continued their flight.

Riding to the home of the noted Long Hunter Henry Skaggs, in present-day Taylor County, the posse enlisted his aid. Skaggs's fierce dogs soon picked up the fugitives' trail, which led them through thick cane breaks. The posse halted for the night, and at day-break Ballenger's men began to skirt the heavy undergrowth. Skaggs vainly attempted to raise a second posse at a nearby log rolling. No one dared to risk death in the almost impenetrable cane breaks, and the Harpes again escaped capture.

Reports that the outlaws were in the area took on an ominous meaning for Col. Daniel Trabue, a prominent Revolutionary War veteran who lived near present day Columbia. His twelve-year-old son's dog had limped home badly wounded, but the youth, who had been sent to a nearby grist mill, had vanished. Several days later Johnny Trabue's dismembered body was found scattered in a sinkhole. The Harpes had literally butchered the boy for a sack of flour.

The pursuit was abandoned near the head of the Little Barren River, but the killings continued. The outlaws reportedly murdered a man named Dooley near present day Edmonton. Shortly afterwards they overpowered Frederick Stump, Jr., the son of a noted Nashville pioneer, who was hunting on his farm near Bowling Green. The Harpes seized his fine rifle and slit his throat. Stump's

body, which was ripped open and filled with stones, was found in the Barren River on or about April 12, 1799. By that time the killers had disappeared into the thinly settled Green River country.

Three brutal murders since the first of the month led Gov. James Garrard to offer a three hundred dollar reward for each of the Harpes on



T. Caltelt, Sebree Banner

This battered marker is on Highway 41A north of Dixon in Webster County.

April 22. The same day he authorized "Devil Joe" Ballenger to extend the pursuit beyond the limits of the state. Yet only the Harpe wives knew the actual whereabouts of their fugitive men. Acquitted of Lankford's murder, the three women were set free on or about April 19. The people of Danville took pity on the trio and their newborn infants. Provided with food and clothing they swore they were through with the Harpes and promised to return to Knoxville. However, thirty miles from Danville they struck out for the Green River country. Posing as young widows they settled near Henderson and awaited their men.

The Harpes' activities during the early summer of 1799 remain mysterious. According to Henderson County tradition, a Captain Young led a party of vigilantes through the region killing several outlaws and forcing others to flee to Illinois. The fact that Young's men were from Mercer County indicates that they had no doubt made the long journey hoping to capture the Harpes and collect the

reward. According to other traditions collected by historian Otto A. Rothert, the Harpes were forced to take refuge at Cave-In-Rock, Illinois. The notorious river pirate haunt was located just across the Ohio from present day Crittenden County. According to legend the Cave's hardened criminals were so shocked by the Harpes' monstrous brutality that they drove the murderous brood back into Kentucky.

It should be noted that a contemporary source claimed that the Harpes killed two or three men in the Cave region during this period. Be that as it may, other sources state that the outlaws, after rejoining their women near Henderson, actually took refuge in the thinly settled region with-

in present-day Hopkins County before returning to Tennessee. Col. Trabue related that the outlaws passed through the Chickasaw country, skirted around Nashville to Stones River and then rode through the wilderness to their old Knoxville haunts.

Sometime in mid-July the disem-boweled body of a man named Hardin was found in the Holston River three miles below Knoxville. About the same time another man, named Bradbury, was found murdered near present day Kingston. Months after they began their reign of terror the Harpes had returned on a murder raid. On July 25 the body of

fifteen-year-old Isaac Coffee was found near the Harpes' former neighborhood on Beaver Creek. The outlaws reportedly dashed out his brains and took his gun and shoes. The same day the body of William Ballard, gutted and filled with stones, was fished out of the river only two miles from Knoxville. Outraged citizens immediately raised a \$450.00 reward for the Harpes' capture.

On the day the last two victims were found, the Harpes were spotted north of Knoxville at Davidson's ferry on the Clinch River. On July 29, two heavily armed riders overtook the Brasel brothers, James and Robert, along the trail in present-day Morgan County, Tennessee. The two riders, keeping with custom, asked, "Gentlemen, what is the news?" After the Brasels recounted the recent Knoxville killings, the strangers announced that they were the vanguard of a posse in pursuit of the murderous Harpes.

The Brasels had just agreed to join the pursuit when the tallest stranger seized James' gun. He charged the Brasels with being the notorious killers and swiftly tied James' hands. In a terrifying instant Robert realized that they were face-to-face with the brutal outlaws. Although closely pursued by Little Harpe, he managed to escape into the woods.

Robert returned to the main trail and soon encountered a party traveling back to Knoxville. They boldly promised to rescue Brasel's brother and pushed on to the scene of the attack. There they found the horribly battered body of James, whose throat had been cut from ear-to-ear. As the party continued southward they suddenly came face to face with the entire outlaw clan. As the grim procession slowly passed by, Robert watched in stunned disbelief as his companions froze with fear. The ferocious glare in their eyes saved the Harpes once again.

Riding northward, the Harpes struck the Kentucky line. On July 31, they murdered John Tully of present-day Clinton County. The murder of Tully spread terror like wildfire across Kentucky—the Harpes had returned for

blood! Col. Trabue sent word to the Governor and published lengthy warnings with the outlaws' descriptions in the Kentucky press. As the news spread through the backwoods many settlers broke with time-honored custom and turned weary travelers from their door.

On August 2, the outlaws were sighted on Marrowbone Creek in Cumberland County. Shortly afterwards the bodies of John Graves and his young son were found near their isolated cabin along the same stream. The Harpes had split their skulls with an axe and tossed their bodies into the brush like dead dogs.

Only a swift horse and grim determination saved John Ellis of old Green County from a like fate. Dispatched by Col. Trabue to warn the settlers at Henderson, Ellis, whose mission became

What made the Harpes so feared was that they killed their own kind with the merciless fury whites normally reserved for their Indian foes.

common knowledge, was relentlessly pursued by the killers. Ellis outdistanced the Harpes and safely delivered his message to Gen. Samuel Hopkins. However, despite the vigilance of local citizens the outlaws were able to slip into old Henderson County where they immediately launched the next phase of robbery and bloodshed.

The well traveled trails to the salt licks in present-day Webster County became the next killing ground. An unfortunate named Trowbridge left Robertson's Lick in August with a load of salt and was never seen alive again. Posing as Methodist ministers, the Harpes rode south to the Deer Creek settlements where they attempted to rob and murder Silas McBee, the local magistrate. Shortly afterwards, on the night of August 20th, the Harpes and their families stopped at the home of Moses Stegall near present-day Dixon.

The horror that followed spawned tales that terrified Kentucky children for generations. Stegall, one of those fron-

tiersmen who rode on both sides of the law, was not at home when the Harpes arrived. His wife, who knew the Harpes from their Knoxville days, agreed to put them up for the night. Another traveler, Major William Love of Livingston County, had previously arrived and was asleep in the cabin loft. Travelers often shared the same room and the Harpes bedded down near the Major. Love had money and a fine horse, to be sure, but he also snored loudly. One of the Harpes reportedly became so enraged that he buried an axe in the sleeping man's skull.

The events of that night are obscured by various traditions. Some accounts claim that the Harpes immediately went downstairs, cursed Mrs. Stegall for boarding them with a "fitted man" and killed both her and her infant son. They

then plundered the cabin and burned it to the ground. Another version states that the killers slept peacefully after slaying Love and went downstairs the next morning for breakfast. They offered to watch Stegall's infant as his wife prepared their meal. As soon as she turned her back they slit the infant's throat. The unsuspecting mother complimented the Harpes on their way with the child and glanced into the cradle. Her screams were cut short by deadly knife thrusts. Stegall's dogs were reportedly locked in the cabin and burned alive. Their yelps of pain and terror led one of the Harpes to snarl, "I reckon they smell hell!"

The ministers who became murderers were vigilantes when they encountered two men, Hudgens and Gilmore, returning with salt from Robertson's Lick. "Arrested" for the Stegall murders, both men surrendered quietly. The Harpes swiftly killed their unarmed prisoners and prowled the neighborhood for more victims.

Travelers to the licks soon discovered the smoking ruins of Stegall's cabin and reported the crime to Squire Silas McBee. On August 25, 1799, McBee, a veteran of Kings Mountain, a vengeful Moses Stegall, and five other well-armed men set out in pursuit of the killers. They tracked the Harpes up Pond River into newly created Muhlenberg County. The following day the posse overtook the outlaws as they were about to murder another man on the trail. Little Harpe fled on foot and disappeared into the forest. Big Harpe galloped into their camp, gathered up his women and continued his flight.

The posse swept into camp, captured Little Harpe's abandoned wife, and pushed on. They soon overtook Big Harpe, who instantly abandoned his women when ordered to surrender and continued his flight. The determined pursuers fired several shots, wounding the desperate fugitive in the leg. John Leiper soon outdistanced his companions and gained on the outlaw. Harpe suddenly reined his horse and was about to turn and fire when Leiper shot him square through the back. The mortally wounded killer raised his rifle only to have it misfire. Hurling his useless weapon to the ground he gamely brandished his tomahawk and rode on. Faint from blood loss he was soon overtaken and dragged from his horse.

The posse gathered around the big outlaw, who was told his time had come. Micajah Harpe, who wished his wife Susannah well, refused to pray and expressed no remorse for his bloody deeds, save one: at one point during their killing spree, fearful that a crying child would give away their hiding place, Big Harpe had snatched up one of his own infants and dashed its brains out against a tree. Finally, Moses Stegall drew his hunting knife, leaned over, and told Harpe he was going to cut off his head. Sheathing his knife, Stegall raised his rifle and shot the outlaw through the heart. Minutes later Harpes' severed head was dumped in McBee's saddle bag. The headless corpse was left for the wolves at a spot still known as Harpes Hill near present-day Graham.

The posse rode back to the vicinity of Robertson's Lick, where the grisly trophy was placed in a tree at the old crossroads near the Deer Creek settlements. Today a Kentucky highway marker entitled Frontier Justice, on Route 41A north of Dixon, identifies the site. By most accounts, Wiley Harpe fled to the Mississippi River region. He joined Samuel Mason's notorious band of river pirates and was hanged in Mississippi in 1804.

The Harpe women were taken to Henderson and indicted for murder in the Court of Quarter Sessions. Conveyed to the Russellville District Court, the trio was acquitted on October 30, 1799. Susannah Harpe and Betsy Roberts settled in old Logan County where the former remarried. Sally Harpe was taken home by her father, remarried and, it was later reported, started a new life in Illinois.

Major William Stewart, the sheriff of Logan County in 1799, recalled that the tall, rawboned Susannah was "rather ugly" but Betsy was "rather handsome... a perfect contrast to her sister." Sally Harpe, he recalled, was "really pretty and delicate." Whether ugly, handsome or delicate, their actual role in the nine-month killing spree may never be known. Were they willing accomplices or virtual prisoners of their brutal husbands? Many times they were left to fend for themselves but they never deserted their men. Yet how far did they have to flee before they felt truly safe from certain death? Be that as it may, there were three knives buried in the charred remains of Mary Stegall.

Although largely forgotten today, the Harpes' homicidal rampage was one of the most dramatic events in Kentucky frontier history. Mystery still surrounds not only their motives but the actual number of victims. "Dead men tell no tales" no doubt guided their hands; the Harpes were not the first or last outlaws who sought to leave no living witness to their crimes. The Harpe women told Sheriff Stewart that their men were so enraged by their 1798 arrest near Knoxville that they "declared war against all mankind." If the traditional accounts are true, these Tory outcasts who were

forced to live with "savages" turned on society with savage vengeance. According to the contemporary newspaper reports, Big Harpe confessed to 18 murders before he died. There were surely more. In addition to their known victims, which numbered at least 25, there were unconfirmed stories of others, including a little girl and a slave boy. Without question the bodies of many of their victims were never found.

Nearly all accounts depict the Harpes, and rightly so, as cold-blooded precursors of the mass murderers of modern America. Yet one could argue that their vengeful campaign also formed a final chapter of the frontier warfare that began in 1776. Frontier warfare, which was marked by burned cabins and butchered bodies, provided their education in violence. The indiscriminate killing of men, women and children by both settlers and Indians mirrored the deeds of the Harpes. What made the Harpes so feared was that they killed their own kind with the merciless fury whites normally reserved for their Indian foes. Whatever their true identities or motives, the Harpes symbolized all too well the dark, brutal side of the Kentucky frontier. 🍷

James M. Pritchard is the Research Room supervisor at the Kentucky State Archives. He is a longtime member of the Kentucky Humanities Council Speakers Bureau. This article is based on one of his talks.

Sources: In addition to contemporary newspapers and public records, material for this article came from the following sources: the Lyman Copeland Draper Collection, University of Wisconsin; Lyman C. Draper, "A Sketch of the Harpes," *Western Literary and Historical Magazine* (September, 1842); T. Marshall Smith, *Legends of the War of Independence and of Earlier Settlements in the West*; Otto A. Rothert, *The Outlaws of Cave In Rock*; Charles Raymond Young (Ed.), *Westward into Kentucky: The Narrative of Daniel Trabue*. The following sources offer a glimpse of the violent climate that spawned men like the Harpes: Richard Maxwell Brown, *The South Carolina Regulators*; John P. Brown, *Old Frontiers: The Story of the Cherokee Indians from Earliest Times to the Date of Their Removal in the West, 1838*; Harry M. Ward, *Between the Lines: Banditti of the American Revolution*.

The International Museum of the Horse
honors the Clay family's great contributions
to racing and breeding in Kentucky.

Kentucky Bloodlines

The Legacy of Henry Clay

Henry Clay knew his way around a horse. And most other kinds of livestock. Justly renowned as one of the great statesmen of the first half of the nineteenth century, Clay is little remembered for his accomplishments as an agrarian and stockman. Yet, while he was serving his country with high distinction as a congressman, senator, secretary of state, and three-time presidential candidate, Clay was also turning his Lexington estate, Ashland, into a model of progressive farming. "I shall make a better farmer than statesman," Clay once wrote to a friend.

In 1805 Henry Clay began building the estate that would serve as his permanent residence for the rest of his life. At its largest, Ashland, a mile and a half from downtown Lexington, encompassed

more than 600 acres. Under the owner's management, it produced outstanding blooded cattle, jacks, sheep, pigs, and, especially, horses.

Clay had a keen eye for horseflesh. As early as 1809, he began racing thoroughbreds. In 1830, he established the Ashland Stud. His accomplishments as a breeder made him a leader in the emergence of Kentucky's Bluegrass region as the nation's premier thoroughbred breeding center. Long after his death the blood of his best stock coursed through the veins of at least a dozen Kentucky Derby winners, and two of those winners were foaled at Ashland.

Kentucky Bloodlines: The Legacy of Henry Clay celebrates not only the great statesman's vital contributions to the Kentucky horse industry, but those of his remarkable descendants as well. Among them were his grandson, James B. Clay, who almost single-handedly introduced trotters to Kentucky, and his daughter-in-law, Josephine Russell Erwin Clay, who became the first prominent thoroughbred horsewoman in America.

On the following pages you'll find a sampling of the outstanding collection of



Henry Clay on horseback strikes a somewhat triumphal pose in this lithograph by Nathaniel Currier. It was an attempt by Clay to identify with voters in the agrarian South by representing himself as a farmer.

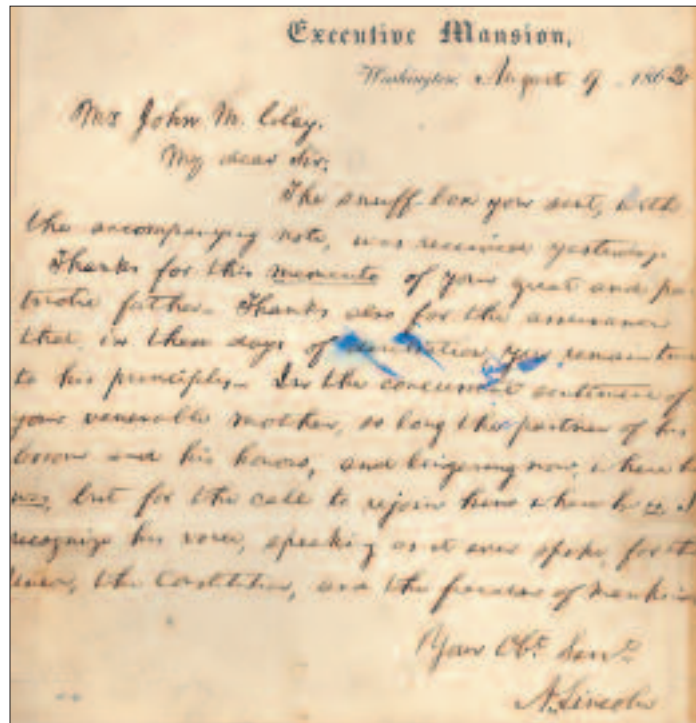
documents, paintings, furniture, silver, and other artifacts—many never before seen in public—that make up *Kentucky Bloodlines: The Legacy of Henry Clay*.

Kentucky Bloodlines: The Legacy of Henry Clay

International Museum of the Horse
Kentucky Horse Park, I-75 at Exit 120
(four miles north of Lexington)
April 1-October 31, 2005
Hours: 9:30-4:30 daily
Admission included with regular
park admission
800/678-8813



John Clay, Henry Clay's youngest son, carried on his father's thoroughbred breeding tradition. On property adjoining the Ashland estate, he established a very successful stud farm called Ashland-on-Tates Creek Pike. After John's death in 1887, his wife Josephine carried on the business until 1909. A woman of many talents—novelist, suffragist, musician, scientific gardener—she was also a splendid horsewoman. Her obituary in 1920 called her “the world’s most noted and successful woman owner and breeder of fine thoroughbreds.”



Abraham Lincoln Letter to John Clay, August 9, 1862
 Abraham Lincoln admired Henry Clay. In 1862, John Clay sent President Lincoln a snuff box that had belonged to his father in recognition of Lincoln's admiration for Clay. Upon receiving the gift, Lincoln replied:

Mr. John M. Clay,
 My Dear Sir,
 The snuff-box you sent, with the accompanying note, was received yesterday. Thanks for this memento of your great and patriotic father. Thanks also for the assurance that, in these days of dereliction, you remain true to his principles. In the concurrent sentiment of your venerable mother, so long the partner of his bosom and his honors, and lingering now, where he was, but for the call to rejoin him where he is, I recognize his voice, speaking as it ever spoke, for the Union, the Constitution, and the freedom of mankind.
 Your Obt. Servant,
 A. Lincoln



A view of Ashland, the Henry Clay estate, after his death in 1852.

Sources for This Article

Jeff Meyer, “Henry Clay’s Legacy to Horse Racing” in *The Register* of the Kentucky Historical Society, Fall 2002.

Exhibit labels from *Kentucky Bloodlines: The Legacy of Henry Clay*. Courtesy International Museum of the Horse.

Artifacts photographed by M. S. Rezny.

Thanks to Bill Cooke, director, International Museum of the Horse.



Josephine Clay with Her Horses, c. 1900

Josephine Clay had great affection for her horses. In "Women in the Professions," a speech she had prepared for the International Conference of Women, in Toronto, Canada, in 1903, she said: "At one time having trouble with my eyes, I was away several weeks for treatment, returning home with glasses. The stock I first visited were about a dozen brood mares at large in a pasture. Glad to see them and expecting a show of reciprocal feeling, I was shocked to observe that their unanimous movement toward me was suddenly and decisively checked, disdainful glances toward me shooting from their bright eyes. I understand the talk of horses and they understand my language. 'Ladies, dear ladies,' I implored, deeply hurt, 'are you not glad to see me?' 'The matter is,' answered Lorna Alta, vindictively, 'you went away from us, and you have come back to us in barnacles. We don't like it.' 'I don't like it either,' I replied, 'but it is something I can't help.' 'Take them off,' demanded Clotaire, 'if you want us to have respect for you.' In my pocket out of sight went the offending glasses, and in a moment they were all frisking around me, testifying the fondest affection."



King René, Watercolor by H. S. Kittredge, 1879.

Major Henry Clay McDowell, married to one of Henry Clay's granddaughters, was a leading Standardbred breeder. King René, regarded as one of the handsomest horses in the country, was one of McDowell's stallions. His progeny were successful in the show ring, and he produced 28 trotters and one pacer with records of 2:30 or better in the mile. McDowell operated Ashland Stud from 1882 to 1899; his son carried it on until 1935, when the property was sold and subdivided.



This ribbon is typical of the myriad of ribbons produced for the 1844 presidential campaign. Made for a Whig Party gathering in Lynchburg, Tennessee, or Virginia, it shows the American eagle, Henry Clay, and a man plowing with the caption "The Ashland Farm." It was meant to appeal to the rural South and West, and to show that Clay was a farmer who understood their agrarian needs and concerns.



Above: Skeddaddle and Squeeze-em. Thomas J. Scott, 1869, Oil on canvas.

In 1860, John Clay bred Magnolia to his stallion, Yorkshire, to produce Skeddaddle. During the Civil War, Confederate General John Hunt Morgan raided Lexington, stealing \$25,000 worth of stock from Clay, including Skeddaddle. Clay ransomed Skeddaddle at Georgetown, but she had been injured and was retired from racing. One of her foals, Squeeze-em by Lexington, was the dam of Day Star, the only Kentucky Derby winner bred by John Clay, but the first of three foaled at Ashland. Clay also bred the first Preakness winner, Survivor, who in the race's inaugural running in 1873 won by ten lengths. His margin of victory was unchallenged until Smarty Jones' triumph in 2004.

Right: Silk Racing Purses won by John and Josephine Clay's Horses.

King Charles II of England introduced silk racing purses, which were definitely used at the races at Stafford in 1763. At the conclusion of the race, the winning jockey collected the purse, which was hung on a wire near the finish line. The last known use of purses in North America was at the 1924 Tijuana Derby.



The Commonwealth's new Poet Laureate
is a novelist whose poetic prose
is critically acclaimed—and bestselling.

Sena Jeter Naslund

Kentucky Poet Laureate 2005-06

Kentucky has an illustrious literary tradition. “Kentucky is increasingly recognized as a state that has produced important national voices in fiction, drama and poetry,” says former state poet laureate Richard Taylor.

Since 1926 Kentucky has named 22 poet laureates, honoring its worthy poets while paying tribute to the art of poetry. Over the years the post of Kentucky Poet Laureate has evolved from a chiefly honorary title to a position which carries the responsibility of promoting the literary arts across the state.

Kentucky's new poet laureate, Louisville writer Sena Jeter Naslund, will carry the literary banner in 2005-06. She officially took office on April 14, 2005. Naslund, a native of Birmingham, Alabama, has lived in Louisville since 1973. She is the author of six works of fiction including the critically acclaimed, national bestselling *Ahab's Wife* and, most recently, *Four Spirits*, a story of the Civil Rights Movement (an excerpt begins on page 14). Both *Ahab's Wife* and *Four Spirits* were named Notable Books by the *New York Times*. A graduate of the University of Iowa Writers Workshop,



*Kentucky
Poet Laureate
Sena Jeter
Naslund*

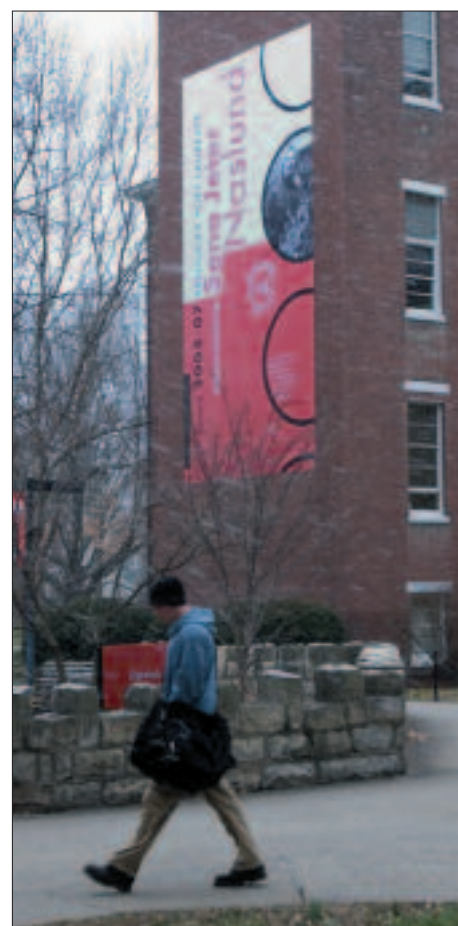
Naslund is a Distinguished Teaching Professor at the University of Louisville and director of Spalding University's brief-residency Master of Fine Arts in Writing program. She is also the founding editor of both the *Louisville Review* and *Fleur-de-lis Press*.

Sena, how do you feel about being chosen as Kentucky's 22nd poet laureate?

I'm delighted to have been chosen. It's unusual for someone to be given this honor who isn't literally a poet, but the charter does say that the poet laureate can be a writer in any genre.

Is poetry important to you?

I love reading poetry, and I teach poetry writing from time to time. I felt that I really learned how to think when I learned how to analyze a short poem. When I was a freshman at Birmingham-Southern College, back in the old days when the content of freshman composition classes consisted of writing about literary texts, I learned how to analyze a poem. Reading poetry has been a huge part of my literary awareness.



How often does a poet laureate get this kind of attention? This banner graces the side of Gardiner Hall at the University of Louisville.

Photos: University of Louisville/Tom Fougereusse

Helicon Homecoming

Has your study of poetry helped your fiction writing?

Absolutely. I've heard people say about poetry that every word counts, but that you can be more lax in fiction. Well, I don't believe that for a minute. I carefully select my language just as if I were writing a short poem rather than a 600-page novel. One thing poetry and fiction have in common is that the specific, concrete, fresh image pulls a lot of weight. Imagery is an essential aspect of allowing the reader to re-create experience. I also pay attention to the sounds of the words in my fiction, as poets do in their work. The rhythm of a sentence matters to me, so in a number of major ways I'm trying to be just as alert to language as the poet is.

In taking this "poetic" approach to writing fiction, was any one writer particularly important as a model to you?

Yes—Katherine Anne Porter, one of the masters of the short story form. She was an American who was very much in the tradition of Flaubert, who advocated the use of *le mot juste*—exactly the right word or phrasing. She was very aware of the connotations of her language and how a story is built from a web of word connotations.

As poet laureate, what do you want to accomplish in a general sense?

I want to encourage people, especially in Kentucky, to turn to the pleasure of reading fiction and poetry, and enjoy seeing plays produced and appreciate the essay as the art form it is. I want to do whatever I can to promote the literary arts in Kentucky.

Specifically, what sort of "programmatic" ideas do you have to accomplish this broader aim?

I want to use the position to promote the idea of the incredible diversity of writers in Kentucky. I intend to invite local writers to share the podium with me and do short

For an introduction to the work of Sena Jeter Naslund, Kentucky's new poet laureate, you couldn't do better than "Helicon Homecoming," the final chapter of *Four Spirits*, her novel of the civil rights movement of the 1960s. The title refers to the four young girls who were killed in a church bombing in Birmingham in 1963.

In the woods, a very old man is talking to his mother, whom white people have called, for long years, Old Aunt Charlotte.

They stand at the edge of a clearing where their ancient shanty leans into a mean wind.

"Mama, I gots to go," he says. "They say there's a march coming to Montgomery. Black folks marching for freedom."

"Look at the sky" she says. To the south, the sky is blue, but from the north gray fluffs, shoulder to shoulder, are coming in. "There's snow in them clouds," she adds. "I seen it before."

"Been so long—"

"I can remember. You could, too, if you tried. Forty, fifty years ago. It snowed. Way down here. You remember. Snowed from Birmingham all the way down here and to Mobile and the Gulf."

"Mama, I was just a boy then."

"No, you wasn't. Not any more than you's a boy now." Not quarreling. Banter. Entertainment. Making the time pass with a few sparkles in it.

"I had white hair, then?"

"Sure 'nuff."

They stand together in front of the small dun house with boards soft as worn denim and look at the sky. Each can see that a few specks of white are striking the face of the other, skittering off their cheeks.

readings when I'm invited to read around the state. I really want to widen the scope of the spotlight in such a way that the diversity of writers in Kentucky is celebrated.

I also want to do what I can to support programs of literacy. After all, writers need readers! Many literacy programs depend on one-on-

"Mama, I gots to go. I got to take my own steps. I come home again."

But if he raises up like that, Charlotte knows what could happen, what has happened to the uppity.

She holds out her hands and snowflakes float into her palms. The sky has become a uniform gray except for a few bays and inlets of blue far to the south.

"I'm leaving," Chris says. "Gots to freedom walk."

"We'll send for you," Charlotte says to her son, "when the roof's back on."

He looks at her strangely. "I loves you, Mama. You done the best you could, by everybody. White and dark." He starts to walk the path through the woods.

Charlotte spits her snuff onto the ground. "I can make snow, too, she says. "Brown snow." She chuckles, looks wickedly at her daughter. But Victoria has her blunt nose tilted up, studying the clouds. Charlotte looks with her. What a multitude of snowflakes!

"It's cold," Victoria says. "We need to move inside."

"You can go, baby. Hurry and you'll catch Chris on the path."

In a few patches around the yard, the snow is beginning to stick. It looks like white scabs.

Victoria turns toward the house. She slowly crosses the yard and climbs up the step.

"I'm going to enjoy this snowfall," Charlotte says to no one.

It's good to be alone. Just herself and the house and yard. The sky. She settles herself on one of the two steps to the dogtrot. Soon all the rake marks in the red dust will be covered. She'll see a pure field of snow, whiter than the best field of cot-

one mentoring, and to me that's a wonderful way to teach reading whether the student is old or young. I want to encourage people who have the time and interest to be mentors to do that.

Third, I want to encourage people to think of the interrelatedness of the arts. I've already done a pro-

ton. "Y'all should of left long, long ago," Charlotte says quietly to the vacancy. "This ain't no place for y'all younguns."

Now there is enough snow on the yard to resemble a threadbare quilt. In the woods, snow is nesting in bright white clumps in the pine needles. "Come on, snow," she says. "Let's cover this."

She holds out her hand. On her palm, she catches a clump of snowflakes. She can see a few sparkling spines sticking out from the glob. After the snow melts in her palm, she tastes the moisture that came down as snow. Her tongue is a warm dove on a cold nest. She wipes her wet hand on her dress.

From behind her, Victoria silently leans down to place a folded quilt over her shoulders. Charlotte looks down at the pad of quilt to see which one it might be. A thick, nice one, pieced curvy to suggest an inlay of blue and yellow ribbons on a white background.

She relaxes under the thick warmth. Then she says, "This be so pretty. All this." The house faces east, and she looks at the land from north to south. "I'm thankful I'm here to see it."

She sits for half an hour, and all the cold red dust is blanketed with snow. Charlotte smiles broader and broader at the falling snow. "Tha's right," she says from time to time. "Come on."

Birds are flying around like they've gone crazy. A blue jay cuts across the yard screaming. Some smart sparrows are perching on a limb, fluffing out their feathers. "Y'all better eat," she advises them. 'Ain't night yet."

She sits on the steps till she begins to turn to stone. The gray sky is darker now with the approach of night, and still the snow is falling. The woods and the yard are beautiful. The quilt slides from her narrow shoulders, but Charlotte no longer feels the cold. She tries pinching

her cheek, but the flesh is too stiff and hard with cold to pinch up. She can feel her fingernails scratching at her skin.

"Time to come in," Victoria says behind her.

Charlotte prepares to enter her home. Her daughter's hand is under her elbow, helping her. It takes a while to unfold her body, but once standing, Charlotte looks up once more. From on high, the snow comes right down into her eyes. She blinks and looks and blinks again. She can scarcely get her fill of it, thick as it falls. All that long drifting down of snowflakes, just to fall on her! But she goes inside.

A few embers glow in the fireplace.

Victoria takes a newspaper from the top of the knee-high stack and crumples it fiercely into a loose ball, which she throws onto the embers. While the paper ball flares up, she lays fat pine kindling in the flame, and then with her bare hands she lifts a big lump of coal from the scuttle and throws it into the grate. The kindling catches right up and begins to snap and pop. Charlotte smells the burning turpentine in the pine sticks and draws the aroma deep into her lungs. For a moment she feels she is a pine tree, a young one, ready to grow tall and strong.

Crawl in bed.

Charlotte looks up and sees the ceiling. She has forgotten the ceiling. She wishes it was gone and the roof, too, so she could look right up through the rafters and see the sky, have the snow fall on her face while she lies down.

Plenty of covers. Charlotte has always kept her winter bed with three quilts. A soft, old-friend quilt closest to her. Old on bottom, newer, newest. Newest, hardest, and prettiest on top. Still, she wishes she'd not left the freshest quilt outdoors, the white one with the wavy blue and yellow ribbon design.

Fend for yourself she says to it. She means to sound encouraging, but the pretty young quilt is too far away to hear; she feels sorry for such a pretty quilt out there, alone in the cold.

"Live forever," she says out loud. She remembers them all in the room: Doctor and Mrs., the three children. "I will," she promises the little girl. Blessed girl.

"Victoria," she calls. She hears her voice like a dry leaf, full of veins and fissures, spreading and crackling itself across the room. "See you in the morning."

Victoria backs up to the fire, lifts her skirts high in back to roast her legs and fanny.

Now close, eyes, so I can see.

There are her four schoolgirls, hovering.

Sing me, she says to the Birmingham girls, the bombed Sunday school girls. Sing high, sweet cherubims, and not a hint of hate.

With a wish, the ceiling is gone, and the roof.

Lying straight and comfortable under her quilts, she begins to rise. She tilts slightly to pass between the open, snowcapped rafters. From the top of a rafter, she pinches a little snow and puts it like snuff between her lower lip and gum. Rising higher, she passes into swirls of snow. Her mattress comes right along under her, the quilts flapping at the sides while she ascends. Jesus is raising the dead, like he'd promised he'd do and did do, when he walked the earth.

Black is the night. She reaches out her hand through the snow to try to catch a sparkling star, tiny as a wedding diamond. But oh, the groaning below, mouths distorted in pain. Still, she can ask it of them, and she does. Sing me!

From all around her, through veils of falling snow, the spirits are gathering.

gram at the Speed Museum in Louisville, but would also love to speak at other art museums and smaller historical museums around Kentucky, because, of course, literature is clearly influenced by cultural/historical situations, it embodies these situations, and comments on them. I believe people who are inter-

ested in physical artifacts can also become interested in literary works as artifacts of history.

We've talked before, Sena, about your lifelong interest in music. How has this interest played out in your writing?

Throughout my career, I've drawn a lot of inspiration from music, espe-

cially classical music. Many of my stories deal with music. Sometimes my response to music is like a spiritual experience. Part of Sherlock Holmes's life that I'm interested in in my novel *Sherlock in Love* has to do with the fact that he owns and plays a Stradivarius violin, and that he's something of a connoisseur of

music. Music represents in the novel Holmes's emotional side, which, for the most part, he represses.

Has your writing gone through recognizable and important changes since you started out?

A major change in my writing occurred after I had my daughter, Flora. Up until that time, I regarded my subject matter in a somewhat casual fashion—I'd write about the things that interested me and that I felt I could write about, but I didn't necessarily feel an imperative to write about one subject as opposed to another. After I had my daughter—she's 24 now—that changed. I

University of Louisville standing at the mailboxes and there was a letter for me from the *Paris Review*. I opened it up and there was a note from George Plimpton, saying how much he loved my story "The Animal Way of Love," and that he was going to publish it. My colleagues Jere Starling and Dick Badessa were standing there, too. They were happy for me and we had a wonderful group hug.

Another happy moment was when I sold *Ahab's Wife*, a book I wrote not knowing if it would ever be published. I had no agent, had no contract. And the book had taken me many years to write. So when it

but also a story of society being transformed by people who advocated non-violence. There's no more important lesson in America today than that huge changes can be made in non-violent ways in our country and outside our country. And it seems to me, given the political climate here right now, that this message can't be stated loudly enough.

Both *Ahab's Wife* and *Four Spirits* have been critically acclaimed national bestsellers. But at first glance, these novels don't seem to have much in common. Do you see these books as similar in any important way?

Yes, I do. Both are about the maturation of the main characters and how they learn to think independently, learn to form bonds of affection that are meaningful, and become involved in society as well as in their own lives. Both novels are about people trying to create a world where they feel at home, and I see both of these novels as being triumphant stories.

What are you up to now?

Well, recently I've written a commissioned dramatic script of *Four Spirits*, with co-author Elaine Hughes, for the Alabama Shakespeare Festival Theater. They've already had a staged reading, and the plan is to do a fully staged production on down the line. I'd love to see this in the months and years to come playing all over the country.

Also with a composer in Louisville, Frank Richmond, we've almost completed a musical version of *Ahab's Wife*, and I'd love to see a full production of that. I also have a contract for a novel on Marie Antoinette, tentatively titled *Heart of a Queen*, and I'm about sixty pages into that. So I have enough going on right now to fill up about the next ten years! 🍷

The interviewer: Jeff Worley is a Lexington poet and editor of *Odyssey*, the University of Kentucky magazine on research and scholarship.

"I've heard people say about poetry that every word counts, but that you can be more lax in fiction. Well, I don't believe that for a minute. I carefully select my language just as if I were writing a short poem rather than a 600-page novel."

began to ask myself this question: What, in my own life, has been of sustaining value to me in difficult times? I gave myself the imperative to write stories that contained something of that answer for me. My new attitude toward my subject matter improved my writing a great deal, gave it more depth.

But what was it about her birth that triggered this sense of re-direction or re-dedication?

The preciousness of life. The uniqueness of life was impressive to me in a new way after I had a child.

What, so far in your career as a writer, has made you the happiest?

Oh [laughs], there's been happiness all along the way! I remember one happy moment when I was at the

not only sold but sold at auction extremely well, that was an ecstatic day. It changed my life in many ways.

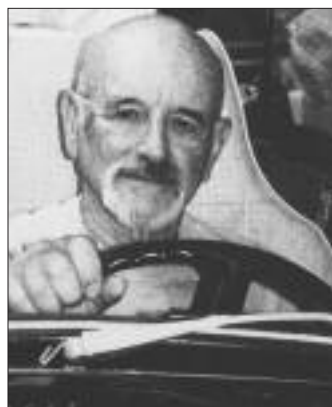
And I know it will make me happy to talk with people all over Kentucky, as the new Poet Laureate, about my writing and the literary arts.

What about your newest novel, *Four Spirits*? How did that novel happen?

This was a book I'd wanted to write since I was a student in Birmingham, Alabama, experiencing the Civil Rights Movement. I promised myself I'd write about it someday and, speaking of happy moments, I fulfilled a promise to myself by writing this book. The civil rights story is not just a tragic story of people who lost their lives,

The Lexington History Museum tells
the stories of Holocaust survivors
who have made Kentucky their home.

This is Home Now



Most of the Holocaust survivors who came to the United States after World War II settled in large cities. There they found Jewish communities and help from people and institutions with some understanding of the horrors they had endured as survivors of Nazi Germany's systematic murder of six million European Jews.

But not all Holocaust survivors went to urban centers—about forty survivors currently call Kentucky home. How and why did they end up in Kentucky, and how have they fared here? The exhibit *This is Home Now: Kentucky's Holocaust Survivors* reveals some answers to those questions as it examines the lives of nine of the survivors now living in the Commonwealth. Some came here immediately after the war while others are recent arrivals. All have compelling stories to tell of learning to live in a place where little was familiar.

This is Home Now will feature approximately thirty black-and-white portraits, many larger than life, by photographer Rebecca Howell. The portraits will reflect the lives of these survivors. John Rosenberg, always on the go, is never shown in the same place twice. Changing light in the one room in which she is photographed illustrates the slower pace of Justine Lerner's life.

Text panels with biographies and quotations will complement the photographs, and there will be two audio stations in the exhibit. Each will consist of a comfortable chair and a handset that allows the listener to choose two-minute excerpts from oral history interviews with the survivors.

Created with the help of a grant from the Kentucky Humanities Council, the exhibit's opening coincides with the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II and the liberation of some of the major Nazi concentration camps. In 2006 *This is Home Now* will also be seen at Northern Kentucky University's Holocaust Education Resource Center and at the Mountain Arts Center in Prestonsburg. It may also become part of the Kentucky History Center's traveling Museums To Go series.

Biographies and oral histories by Arwen Donahue.
Photographs by Rebecca Howell.

This is Home Now: Kentucky's Holocaust Survivors

Lexington History Museum
215 West Main Street, Lexington, KY
May 12, 2005-January 12, 2006
Hours: 12-4 Friday, Sunday, and Monday;
10-4 Saturday; closed Tuesday-Thursday
859/254-0530
Admission: Free
www.lexingtonhistorymuseum.org



Sylvia Green

Winchester

Sylvia Green was born in Karlsruhe am Rhein, Germany in 1924. As hostilities against Jews mounted following the Nazis' 1933 rise to power, Sylvia's parents were allowed to send one of their two children to a foster home in England. Fearing that the danger of remaining in Germany was greater for boys, they sent Sylvia's brother, Bernard. In 1938 the family was forced to return to Poland, where Sylvia's father had been born. They settled with Sylvia's Aunt Mina in Kraków. Sylvia and Mina became slave laborers, and in 1942 they were sent to Plaszów, a concentration camp in Kraków's suburbs. Sylvia never saw her parents again. She and Mina survived three camps in all, including Auschwitz, and were liberated by British troops on April 15, 1945.

Sylvia's brother Bernard had immigrated to the United States from England and joined the U.S. Army. He found Sylvia and Mina in their last camp, Bergen-Belsen. In 1946, the three of them moved to Lexington, Kentucky, where they had relatives. Sylvia married Jake Green in 1949 and moved to Winchester, where Jake owned a dry goods store. Jake passed away in 1997. Sylvia has two children and four grandchildren.

"I saw Hitler many times. I was a nosy child and whenever he came, I would not go down to see him in my neighborhood because everybody knew I was a Jew. I would go blocks and blocks out of my way, where they didn't know me. I was just fascinated by him. It was just like he hypnotized people. I was there in the front row, and everybody yelling, 'Heil Hitler!'"

"After the war ended, I had a lot of living to do, because I didn't live before. Everybody felt that way. We ate too much, we drank too much, we just felt like a bird coming out the cage. It's very overpowering, all that freedom."

"I became a citizen of the United States in 1952. That was a very important event, because I never was a citizen of any country. I was born and raised in Germany, but my father was a Polish citizen, and your nationality was what your father's nationality was. So I never had a country to call my own, and this was a very happy moment. I felt like an American, but I was very upset with the judge. They called you up there, and you sat in front, facing the people, and all in a sudden, he said, 'I notice here, you were incarcerated. What were you incarcerated for?' And that's all it took. I start crying and screaming. Jake said you could hear me in the back row. The only crime I ever committed was I was born to Jewish parents."

“In 1956, when I was in the U.S. Air Force, we brought an airplane from England back to New York. The radar operator on my plane—I was the navigator—was a fellow from South Carolina who was black. And he and I got on the train in New York together to come home. When we got to Washington, he got up all of a sudden and said, ‘I’ll see you when we get back.’ I said, ‘Where are you going?’ And he said, ‘I’m going to the back of the train, where the blacks are.’ I said, ‘What?’ And he said, ‘Yeah, I need to go there, otherwise we’re going to have some trouble.’ And he did. I think it was an incident that changed my life, really. I was really outraged and aggravated and thought eventually maybe I can help to do something about that.”

“I’ve never been conscious, really, of anti-Semitism here in Prestonsburg in any major way. I know that people who are strong Christians do feel that if you’re not saved, you’re going to hell. And so they have a real concern about us, whom they may like and they don’t want us to go to hell. And they would like us, I’m sure, to be saved.”

“And I went over into Blackey, Kentucky. There was a fellow named Joe Begley, who was running a country store, who was a very strong anti-strip mining advocate. We talked a lot about their history and the problems that he saw, poor people, and that people were getting run over by strip miners. So Joe was pointing out also how poor people couldn’t get lawyers. There were many situations where he thought it would be just a wonderful thing if we could have lawyers available to represent poor people. And so we decided that this would be an interesting opportunity to try to come to Eastern Kentucky...to help start this legal services program. I think we probably thought we might be here two or three years, and we’ve been here for more than thirty.”

John Rosenberg

Prestonsburg

John Rosenberg was born in Magdeburg, Germany in 1931, two years before Hitler came to power. John’s childhood was relatively normal until November 8, 1938—the date infamously known as Kristallnacht, the Night of Broken Glass. That night, Jewish homes, businesses, and synagogues were attacked all over Germany. The following morning, John’s father was arrested and imprisoned for eleven days, after which the family was ordered to leave the country.



After a year in a detention camp in Rotterdam, Holland, John’s family obtained passage to the United States in 1940 and settled in Gastonia, North Carolina. Enthusiastically embracing his new country, John earned a degree in chemistry, served in the Air Force, and then got a law degree. In the 1960s he worked for the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice, participating in many crucial desegregation and voting rights cases in the South. By 1969, John had become the Chief of the Criminal Section of the Civil Rights Division, but he and his wife Jean, who also worked in the Division, wanted to make a greater contribution towards social justice. They moved to Prestonsburg, Kentucky, where John founded the Appalachian Research and Defense Fund of Kentucky, which still provides legal services to the poor. He retired in 2001.

“The minute we arrived to Auschwitz, as soon as the train stopped, it became like a terrible wind. And they separated us, the women this way and the men that way. Didn’t see my father anymore. My sister was next to me, but she wouldn’t part with her children, so they pulled her out on this side. So, I ran out from my side and I went to be with my sister. And the SS, they had canes. They took the cane and put around my neck and pulled me out. They pulled me back to that line. So, I ran again over to my sister. I was scared, I wanted to be with her. So he took me out for the second time and he hit me with the cane over the head and that was the end of it. I never saw my family again afterwards.”

“I always felt that this was my mother’s and my father’s last wish, that somebody has to remain from the family and carry on. And I was the one to survive and that’s what I have to do. I have to build back what we lost. That’s the way I lived after the war. Of course, it’s just like a made up story, but this helped me a lot in my life. Like I’m not doing it, but somebody else tells me to do it.”

Justine Lerner

Louisville

Justine Lerner was born in Bialystok, Poland in 1923, one of eight children in a close-knit family. After the Germans invaded the area, they forced Bialystok’s Jews into a ghetto. In 1943 the ghetto was liquidated and Bialystok’s 30,000 remaining Jews were sent to concentration and extermination camps. Justine was transported to Auschwitz—she was the only member of her family to survive the war. In 1944 Auschwitz was evacuated. Justine was moved to Switau, Czechoslovakia, where she was liberated by the American army in May, 1945. She was in Paris waiting to immigrate to the United States, where she had family, when she met her future husband, an American soldier. In 1947 the couple came to the U.S., settling in Brooklyn, New York.

Justine’s husband died in the mid-1990s. In 1997 Justine was robbed and beaten in her Brooklyn home. Immediately after this incident, Justine’s only son, Joel, brought her to live near him in Louisville.

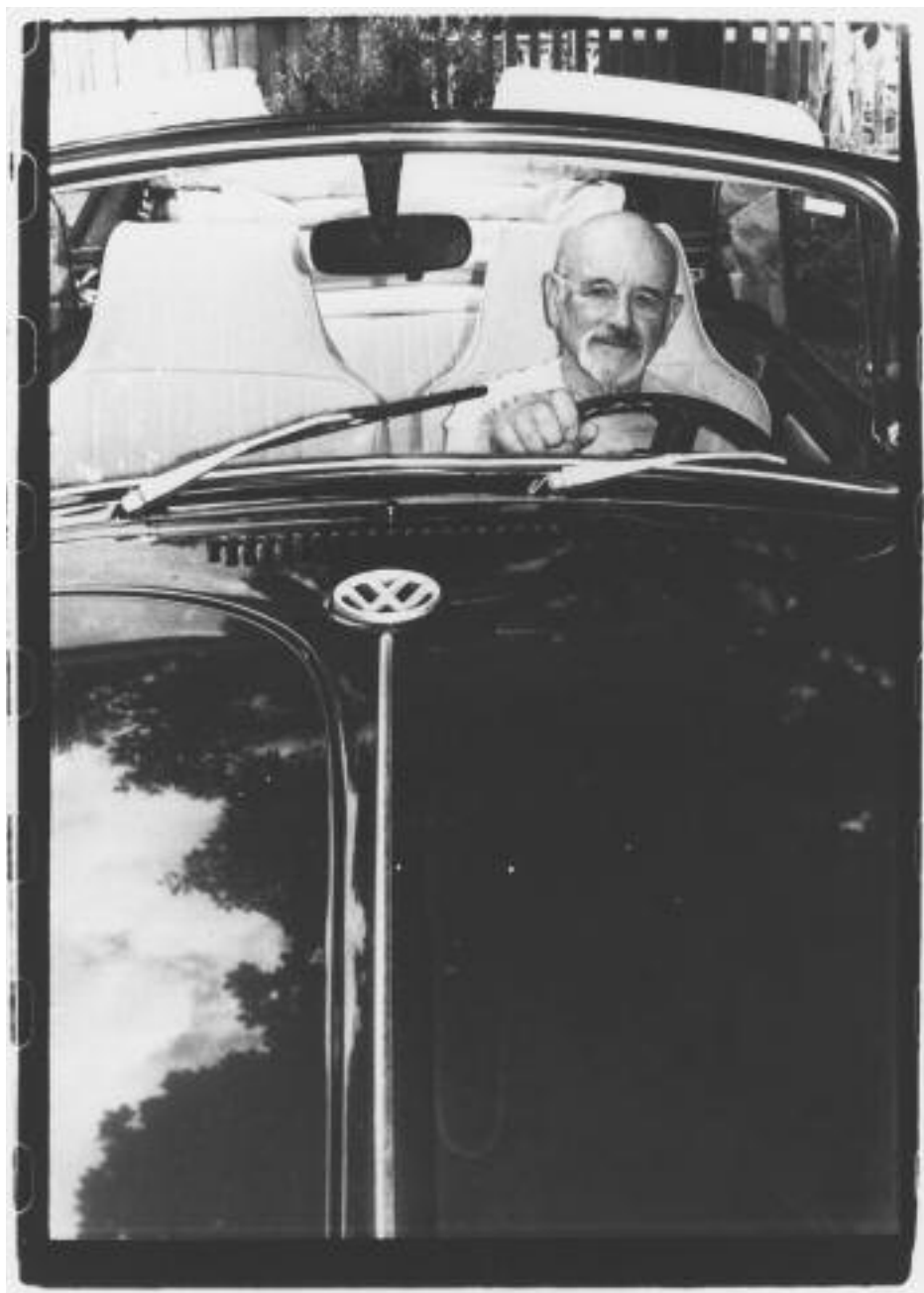


Robert Holczer

Paris

Robert Holczer was born in Budapest, Hungary in 1929. Soon after the German invasion of Budapest in March 1944, Jews began to be deported to Nazi camps. Robert and his mother evaded the authorities by moving into an apartment building that served as a clinic for wounded Hungarian soldiers, who were Nazi allies. With the secret help of a Hungarian officer, the clinic saved Jews who lived in the building from deportation. At least ten members of Robert's family lived in the apartment's one-and-a-half rooms. Robert worked in the clinic as an assistant to the doctors. In January 1945 the Russians liberated Budapest. Both of Robert's parents survived the war: his father in a Yugoslavian labor camp, his mother in the clinic.

After the war Robert lived in Israel for two years, then returned home to Hungary. In 1956 he fled Hungary for the United States. He worked, traveled, and studied in Missouri, Colorado, Alaska, and California. In the San Francisco Bay area, where he worked as a teacher, he met his future wife, Jan. In 1974, Robert and Jan moved to Frankfurt, Germany, where Robert taught for the next nineteen years. In 1993, they retired to Paris, Kentucky, where Jan's sister and brother-in-law own a horse farm.



“My life was saved in Budapest by a man who amazingly appeared at the time when I thought that this was my last moment on earth. I was sent out because a horse fell on the street from shrapnels and we needed some meat. And a patrol came and caught me and they were yelling, ‘This looks like a Jew,’ and ‘Take off your pants.’ Since in Europe only Jews are circumcised, it was easy to detect who was a Jew. And I was snow-white probably and shaking, and all of a sudden another man with a higher rank came and said to the guys, ‘Look, I see four, five Jews on that corner. Go catch those, I take care of this idiot here.’ And so we went under the doorway and I was unbuttoning my pants and shaking. He said, ‘Listen, are you crazy? Do you have a place where you are staying?’ I said yes. He said, ‘Go back and I don’t ever want to see you again on the street.’ And we came out and he was hitting me, and he said to these people, ‘This idiot, he’s not a Jew.’”

“We used to visit here, in Paris, Kentucky. I was always defiant. Never opened my eyes to what is here. I would sulk and occasionally complain that there’s not much to do here. It doesn’t even have sidewalks. And the fences bothered me. Everything is fenced in. After we bought the house, I was walking around, and my past caught up with me. I spent a great deal of time in nature as a child. All the smells of my childhood came back to me. I realized this is not a bad place—and it is so peaceful. I came back to the house, and the whole family was gathered around, and said ‘I want to say something to you. I can live here, very well.’ And that was the end. All my sulking went away. This is my last station. I am here for good.”

A Kentuckian remembers her childhood in the coal fields of western Kentucky. Life was simple but good, especially when you got the better of the local bullies.

Coal Country of My Heart

One-Room Schoolhouse. I had known about Wilson school ever since my brother John started first grade there a year before. Now I could say my ABCs and count all the way to a hundred, and it was finally my turn to go to school. “You watch out for your little sister, now,” Mother said to John as she turned to leave us with Miss Mary and the other students at the white frame one-room schoolhouse.

The summer before, our family had moved to Mr. Parham’s place, an aging farmhouse without electricity, indoor plumbing or central heat. The sole attraction of the Parham place—except for the white wooden icebox the Parhams had abandoned to the inside corner of the back porch—was the house’s proximity to Wilson school and Pine Hill, the underground coal mine where Daddy worked.

Mr. Parham, a dish-faced man with sun-wrinkled skin and twinkly eyes, had turned over his land to a strip mine and moved his family eight miles away into Madisonville, the county seat of Hopkins County and the heart of the west Kentucky coalfields. It was a good arrangement. The strip mine got the coal, Mr. Parham got paid for the coal and for

renting us his house, and we lived close enough to Wilson school for John and me to walk there. A few hundred yards beyond the school was the railroad that served Pine Hill, and just beyond the railroad was the mining camp, a string of small, shabby houses with faded and peeling barn-red paint where the men employed in the lowest paying jobs at Pine Hill lived with their families.

Besides the teacher’s desk and chair, Wilson school featured a corner table holding a glass water jug with a metal spout, a black potbellied stove, and several rows of student desks of gradually increasing sizes screwed into the bare oiled floor. In the desks was storage space for books, supplies and the bag lunches students brought from home, together with an aluminum cup to take to the water jug when we were thirsty. On the wall behind the teacher’s desk was a room-spanning blackboard topped with the alphabet in both capital and lower case cursive letters. Centered above the alphabet, George Washington looked down on us from a gold-framed picture.

Miss Mary sat behind her desk doing whatever teachers do at their desks, her dark hair pulled back in a twist at the nape of her neck. A decided overbite kept

her from completely closing her lips, and her brown eyes crinkled at the corners when she smiled. Another girl and a boy sat in the first grade row with me. John sat across the aisle from us in the row of three second-graders, the third-graders in the row beyond, and on up through the eighth grade, where the two Carriway boys sat. Held back two or three years for unsatisfactory performance, Harry and Henry clearly resented being there.

“Mr. and Miz Carriway don’t care anything about education,” Mother grumbled when we saw them walking down the sidewalk in Madisonville one Saturday afternoon. “No wonder their boys don’t study.”

Bigger than the other kids in school, the brothers were about the same size—at least two inches taller than Miss Mary and many pounds heavier. Their voices sounded like grown men’s voices and their stringy dark blond hair fell low across their brows, almost obscuring their menacing eyes. They shoved their hands into their pockets and hunched their shoulders forward when they walked, as though daring anyone to approach them. Their posturing worked; I was afraid of them.

When it was time for our lesson, Miss Mary called the first-graders up to the

backless bench in front of her desk. When she finished our lesson, she sent us back to our desks and called the second-graders to come to the bench. After them, she called the third-graders, gradually working her way up until kids from all eight grades had taken their turn up front on the teaching bench. But if I behaved myself and didn't talk without first raising my hand and receiving permission, I could sit on the bench with the other classes and listen to their lessons. I often did that. Miss Mary varied the routine only in winter, when she moved the teaching bench closer to the potbellied stove with its open pan of water on top, evaporation humidifying the dry winter air.

One day when Miss Mary turned her back to write on the blackboard, Harry Carriway stood up at his desk, snapped open the blade of a long pocketknife and threw it at Miss Mary's back. Boing! The knife hit the blackboard and stuck there, waving back and forth beside Miss Mary's right arm.

Horrified, I waited. After what seemed an eternity, Miss Mary slowly turned around, her voice belying the quietness of her movement. "Out! Of! My! Room!" she shouted, an index finger sharply punching the air after each word, eyes locked with those of the still-standing boy. "And don't ever come back!"

For one long moment, the defiant teenager hesitated, as though considering his options. Then, scowling as if he were the offended party, he stalked wordlessly out the door, his brother one step behind him.

In the uneasy silence that followed, the attention of 25 shocked kids squarely on Miss Mary's face, she turned her back to us and yanked the knife out of the blackboard. "School dismissed," she said quietly, knife in hand and face averted.

Darting unsure glances at one another, we hastily gathered our belongings and left in uncharacteristic quietness, too stunned to be excited that we were getting out of school early. Just as I reached the

door, I looked back over my shoulder at Miss Mary. She was still at the blackboard, face in hands and shoulders shaking.

I'm not sure whether I heard her sobs or only imagine them in retrospect, but this I know: she had passed a test. To keep control of the youngest student, she had to gain control of the oldest.

I would live to rue the day she passed her test.

thing in his lungs except air. Or perhaps, since Daddy had gone to work in the mine when he was only 16, he feared the Black Lung disease that plagued many underground coal miners.

Whatever the reason, neither Daddy nor anyone in his family smoked. But Mother's father and brothers smoked, and in a state known for its burley tobacco farms, smoking was very common. Still,

Courtesy of Carole Harris Barton



Mother Load. Inserting between my lips the tip of a four-inch long piece of dried grapevine, the ash on the other end glowing, Lucy instructed me. "Just hold your nose and suck in, really hard," said the sixth grade girl, "and the smoke will come into your mouth."

We were inside the girls' outhouse, five or six other older girls standing outside to keep watch. "If you won't tell on us for smokin'," Lucy had said, "we'll give you a puff."

"I won't tell," I promised, falling for the trick. Of course I wouldn't tell—not after I had participated!

Neither Mother nor Daddy smoked. Mother thought no one should smoke, and since tuberculosis had left Daddy fatherless at the age of 11, he refused to put any-

March 1945 (from left): The author, Carole Harris Barton, 6; her brother John Harris, 8; their first cousin Betty Sisk, 6; and Judy the dog. John is a Presbyterian minister living in Florida. Betty, along with her husband and son, owns and operates a retail gun store in Madisonville, Kentucky. Judy helped bag the quail that often appeared on the Harris dinner table.

the grownups I'd seen smoking didn't seem to work at it as hard as I was working. I couldn't seem to draw the smoke through the porous vine into my mouth, no matter how hard I tried.

Suddenly, the door of the outhouse swung open and there stood Miss Mary. "You know it's against the rules to smoke

on the school grounds!” she spat out, hands on hips and eyes blazing.

I didn’t, although if I had thought, I would have known something was wrong with what we were doing. Otherwise, I wouldn’t have had to promise not to tell, and we wouldn’t have been hiding. Still, I was surprised when Miss Mary marched us inside, lined us up in front of the other students and began to spank us, one by one. Starting with Lucy, Miss Mary worked her way down to me.

One day when Miss Mary turned her back to write on the blackboard, Harry Carriway stood up at his desk, snapped open the blade of a long pocketknife and threw it at Miss Mary’s back.

The wait was agonizing. But all I could do was wait while each punished girl yelped and hopped around in a futile effort to avoid Miss Mary’s thrashing hand, afterward slinking miserably to a seat. *Maybe Miss Mary’ll be tired by the time she gets to me.* But she wasn’t—at least, not as far as I could tell.

When it was over, it wasn’t over. For the last of the hardened criminals to reap the consequences of our actions that day still had to go home when school was out. And even worse than the whipping was the fear of what Mother would do when I got there. She was the disciplinarian, so Daddy was not a worry—just Mother. *John thinks he’s my boss and he’s gonna tell on me. Blabbermouth!*

I knew it was no good asking him not to tell. Mother expected him to keep her informed, and if he didn’t, he would be in trouble, too, when she found out. And with the obligatory eyes in the back of her head and the proverbial ear to the ground, she would find out. She *always* found out.

Sure enough, when we went home that afternoon, John told Mother.

Now, when Mother was furious, she was loquacious, her pent-up energy spewing forth in a cascade of words. “My kids don’t misbehave in school!” she fumed, pacing up and down across the kitchen floor. “What do you mean, Carole Sue, lettin’ other peo-

ple lead you around by the nose? You don’t have to do somethin’ just because somebody else tells you to! You’ve got a head. Use it! I never in my life—”

The next day, Mother went to school to talk to Miss Mary. Corporal punishment was acceptable in schools, so the spanking wasn’t the issue. The issue was what Mother needed to do to help Miss Mary keep me under control.

Miss Mary felt bad about spanking me, she said, because she knew the older girls

had led me astray. But she had to spank them, and she couldn’t spank them without spanking me, too. Anyway, that’s what Mother reported to Daddy that night, being sure that I was there to hear the full report. “I guess you’d better start behavin’ yourself, little girl,” said Daddy mildly.

“But I *am* bein’ hav,” I insisted.

They collapsed into laughter, my naive word twist saving me from more scolding. But every morning for days afterward, Mother repeated the same mantra when John and I left for school. “No more breakin’ rules, little girl, or the next time, you’re gonna be in *real* trouble.” *Gonna be? If this is not real trouble, what is?*

The question weighed heavily on my mind. It was a Mother load.

Evening the Odds. After the Carriways, the next meanest kids at Wilson school were Billy and Bobby Joe York. They were smaller than the Carriways, but both Yorks were bigger than John, and Billy was older. His slicked-down black hair, olive skin and lanky body contrasted with Bobby’s red hair, freckles and stocky build as much as Bobby’s rowdy peskiness contrasted with Billy’s brooding surliness.

For all of their differences, the brothers had at least one thing in common: they both picked on John at school, some-

times following us home, throwing rocks at John’s feet, taunting him and threatening him with sticks. The concept of fair play was apparently foreign to them; two on one was simply good odds. And they evidently considered me unworthy of their belligerence, for they never included me in their taunts.

One day, Billy’s threats moved to action and he punched John. Standing by with fists poised, Bobby Joe was fully prepared to come to his older brother’s aid if necessary. It wasn’t.

“Well, what did you do when he hit you, John?” asked Mother when he went home crying.

“Nothin’,” he said, eyes downcast.

“Nothin’?” Mother was aghast. “Nothin’? Son, nothin’s not good enough,” she shrieked. “You can’t just let them beat you up. You’ve got to defend yourself! If they know you won’t take up for yourself, they’ll just keep pickin’ on you.” Sandwiched between two older and two younger brothers, Mother almost certainly was drawing on her personal experience with childhood conflict.

The next day, Billy and Bobby Joe jumped John again. This time when we told Mother, she was even angrier than the first time. “John Morgan,” she said, her voice tightly controlled. “If you don’t defend yourself the next time they jump on you, I’m gonna—” Then she turned to me. “And Carole Sue, the next time they jump on John, don’t just stand there. You *help* him!”

“But I thought we weren’t supposed to fight.” It was more of a question than a statement.

“You’re not. You won’t be fightin’. You’ll be defendin’!”

By the time I noticed the fight the next day at recess, the two bullies had John down on the ground, arms and legs flailing, dust flying and all three of them rolling around in the dirt screaming at one another.

Mother’s words ringing in my ears, I hesitated not one second. Picking up a downed tree limb, I walked up behind a completely oblivious Billy and Bobby Joe, who by now had John on his back desperately struggling to push them off. Raising the limb over my head with both hands, I swiftly brought the weapon down across

the backs of the two unsuspecting bullies—whack! I had pulled back for another blow when they jumped up and started backing off. “I’m gonna tell Miss Mary on you,” screamed Bobby Joe, his angry face nearly as red as his hair.

“You’ll be sorry, you just wait and see!” shouted Billy, shaking his fist at me. Then he and Bobby Joe turned and ran.

“All right,” said Miss Mary when the bell summoned us back inside and Bobby Joe told her what had happened—except for the part about the attack on John. “I want to see it. You go outside and bring me the limb she hit you with.”

My heart jumped up into my throat. Another whipping at the hands of my teacher was sure to meet Mother’s definition of real trouble.

Bobby Joe returned, dragging a much bigger limb than I had used, one obviously too heavy for me to lift. If I could see the lie, Miss Mary could see it, too. But that type of thinking was more sophisticated than I was, and I was too scared to speak, almost too scared to think.

Miss Mary didn’t even look in my direction. “Bobby Joe, I’m ashamed of you,” she said, eyes narrowed to threatening slits. “You take that limb back outside where you found it. And don’t you dare ever lie to me again!” Bobby Joe turned in the direction of Miss Mary’s pointing finger, backing off for the second time that day. *Dumb ol’ Bobby Joe. He can’t even lie his way out of trouble!*

Had Bobby Joe not stretched the truth the day I evened John’s odds, I have no idea what would have been the outcome. But it was of no consequence to Daddy, who told and retold the story to friends and family for years afterward. “Don’t mess with them Harris women,” he bragged, laughing.

“Them Sisk women, you mean,” Mother joked, putting her lineage in friendly competition with Daddy’s.

I didn’t care which side of the family got the credit, as long as I got my share. And I always did.

One Step Ahead. We were almost hypnotized, John and I, by the smooth, rhythmic flow of the huge dark green dragline working behind Mr.

Parham’s barn. The gigantic machine had rolled in on its caterpillar treads and was now working in the monstrous hole the miners had dynamited in the ground. Excavation its main job, the dragline routinely stripped away the layers of rock and soil covering the seam of coal so close to the earth’s surface as to render more expensive underground mining unnecessary.

With its giant metal scoop suspended on a steel wire cable from a crane, the machine cast the bucket to the ground and dug its saw-toothed edge deeply into the earth. Scraping and digging its way along, the scoop gobbled up great mouthfuls of dirt and surface debris as it ponderously crawled toward the machine, pulled across the ground by another cable: the dragline. Once the scoop was full, the machine elevated its load high above the ground and rotated on its swivel base until the burden hung directly over the top of the spoil bank beside the excavation site. Only then did the scoop open its mammoth jaws and spill its capture onto the rising mound now growing taller with each bucketful of discarded earth.

“Fire in the hole,” shouted a miner. I looked up to see Mother sprinting across the yard toward John and me. She reached us a split second before I heard

Raising the limb over my head with both hands, I swiftly brought the weapon down across the backs of the two unsuspecting bullies—whack!

the blast and felt the almost simultaneous rumble, then the spray of dirt and bits of rock that showered down upon us. I had heard the warning but had understood neither its meaning nor exactly what had just happened. Nor did I realize that I had just survived an encounter with the risks of a child’s life in coal country.

“You kids come in the house right this minute,” Mother cried, grabbing us each by the hand. Hurrying us onto the back porch, she brushed the debris out of our hair and off our clothes. The only hurt was Mother’s fright.

Once she had us inside the house, she squatted down to our eye level. “The next time you hear a man yell out, ‘Fire in

the hole,’ that means they’re gonna set off dynamite,” she said, urgency in her voice. “Don’t wait till you hear the blast; just run as fast as you can to the house. Don’t stop to pick up your toys or anything.”

That night, Mother told Daddy about the dynamite. “The strip mine’s gettin’ too close for comfort,” she concluded. “It’s not safe for the kids.”

We moved before school was out. A dilapidated four-rooms-and-a-path, our home now was within spitting distance of Pine Hill, and our walk to school longer, following a worn footpath through the woods and approaching the school from a different direction. At the end of the year, Mother took our report cards and locked them in her cedar chest with the rest of the family keepsakes. *Our report cards are in the cedar chest? I didn’t know they were that important!*

“The strip mine’s progressin’ and they’re gonna tear down Wilson schoolhouse,” Mother told us. “Next year, they’re gonna send a school bus to take you kids to a consolidated school at Anton.”

We had been chased out of our home one step ahead of a strip mine, and now we were being chased out of our school one step ahead of a demoli-

tion crew. It wasn’t remarkable; it was just coal country.

I suppose it was a good thing. At least we were ahead.

Stirring Up Rainbows. “Don’t pull up them ol’ weeds!” ordered John, tossing me a backward glance. “They’ll make you sneeze.”

We had spent the early afternoon playing in our front yard and watching the operations of the tippie. Fascinated with the mine’s workings when we first moved to Pine Hill, we were now bored with the repetition.

The cage, carrying a mini-railcar, rode its steel wire cable up the vertical

shaft to the top of the tippie straddling a spur off the main railroad track, tilted the car and dumped a load of coal onto the shaker. As the cage slid back down the cable for more coal, the huge metal shaker shuddered in rickety-rackety vibration, sifting the coal through holes of different dimensions that sorted and graded the chunks by size to be transported out in the railcars waiting below. And it repeated the process time after time, day after day, sometimes even on Saturday and Sunday.

The copper-colored groundwater had the appearance of redeye gravy, and it was just as greasy, though it tasted not at all like the delicious drippings left in the skillet where Mother had fried country ham.

Finally, the late afternoon steam whistle blew—whoo! whoo! whoo!—the three blasts announcing quitting time. “That’s it,” said John. The next time the cage climbed up the shaft, it would carry a load of men instead of coal, and it would stop at ground level instead of sliding on up the tippie.

Exiting the cage, the miners were indistinguishable one from the other, all as black as soot no matter what color they were when they went underground that morning. They all wore clumpy protective steel-toed shoes, a headlamp clipped above the bill of their hard caps. Attached to an electric power cord that snaked down the miner’s backs to a portable battery swinging from their belts, the headlamp beamed the indispensable light that provided visibility underground.

But Daddy would have things to do topside before he came home, and John and I were tired of waiting. Abandoning our front yard, we walked down the road past the mine toward the bank of mailboxes for the mining camp. We would make a trial run to see how long it would take us to walk to the school bus stop, a precaution against missing the bus when school started in a few days. While John entertained himself by sailing flat rocks at the ground to kick up dust, I dawdled along behind taking care of important

business: plucking goldenrods from the side of the road to make a bouquet.

“They’re not weeds!” I argued, defending the maligned plants that he and others considered a nuisance but I considered wildflowers, beautiful even if their fragrance wasn’t. I fully intended to surprise Mother with a handful of them in a green-tinted Ball jar filled with water, regardless of what John said. I had visions of our family at supper that night, the flowers gracing our oilcloth-covered

kitchen table and brightening our otherwise drab surroundings. “And they don’t make me sneeze, either.”

On the other side of the road was a shallow stream that carried storm water runoff from the mine’s outside operations, where countless bits of coal and rock flaked off the processed coal and lay on the ground like breadcrumbs on a kitchen floor. Scraped up and piled into huge slack heaps, these worthless fragments yielded to the inevitable rains that raced across their shiny black surfaces and leached out the minerals, flushing them into the stream. The resultant copper-colored groundwater had the appearance of redeye gravy, and it was just as greasy, though it tasted not at all like the delicious pan drippings left in the skillet where Mother had fried country ham.

I knew this, because I had once confirmed it by dipping into the water an index finger and touching it to the tip of my tongue. One taste was enough. The sample had a distinctly metallic tang much like the copper penny I had once held in my mouth for a few seconds before Mother caught me and insisted that I spit it out.

I didn’t intend to taste the coppery water again; still, it captured my attention. Squatting on the bank of the stream, I laid my goldenrods down and lightly trailed a

finger in the water, gently swirling the patch of oil floating on the surface and watching the glinting sunlight flash tiny shimmers across the iridescent colors.

“Quit playin’ in that awful stuff,” growled John, frowning at coal country’s pollution. “It’s dirty!”

“I’m not playin’,” I protested. “I’m stirrin’ up rainbows.”

The puzzled look on John’s face told me he didn’t understand. I didn’t care and I didn’t explain. Undeterred from my goal, I picked up my treasured goldenrods and moved on. And that night, just as I envisioned, my disparaged bouquet found a place of honor on our family supper table.

We can see heaven in a wildflower, wrote poet William Blake two centuries earlier. And then he cautioned: Never doubt what you see, for if you do, you’ll never believe.

I have never doubted what I saw that day, and today I believe in the transcendent power of beauty. For I have seen William Blake’s heaven in a wildflower. And I have seen my very own rainbows in coal country.

The next week, a big yellow school bus carried John and me to the world of a big consolidated school. In this world, each of 12 classes held more students than our entire school held the year before, lunches came on trays in the cafeteria, and sex education came from a four-letter word scrawled on a playground trash barrel. A few years later, in an action that would change our lives forever, a big moving van carried our family to Madisonville and the world of a small town. In this world, concrete sidewalks bracketed paved streets, houses boasted indoor bathrooms, and the post-war world edged the 1940s into the past—and into the coal country of my heart. 🌈

Carole Harris Barton, a native of Hopkins County, Kentucky, grew up in Madisonville. Now retired after a career in federal and local government, she is a wife and mother who lives with her husband Paul in Fairfax, Virginia and Clearwater, Florida. Her website is www.chbwrites.com

Adapted from *Rainbows in Coal Country*, a PublishAmerica book to be released in Spring 2005. ©2005 by Carole Harris Barton. Used by permission of the author.

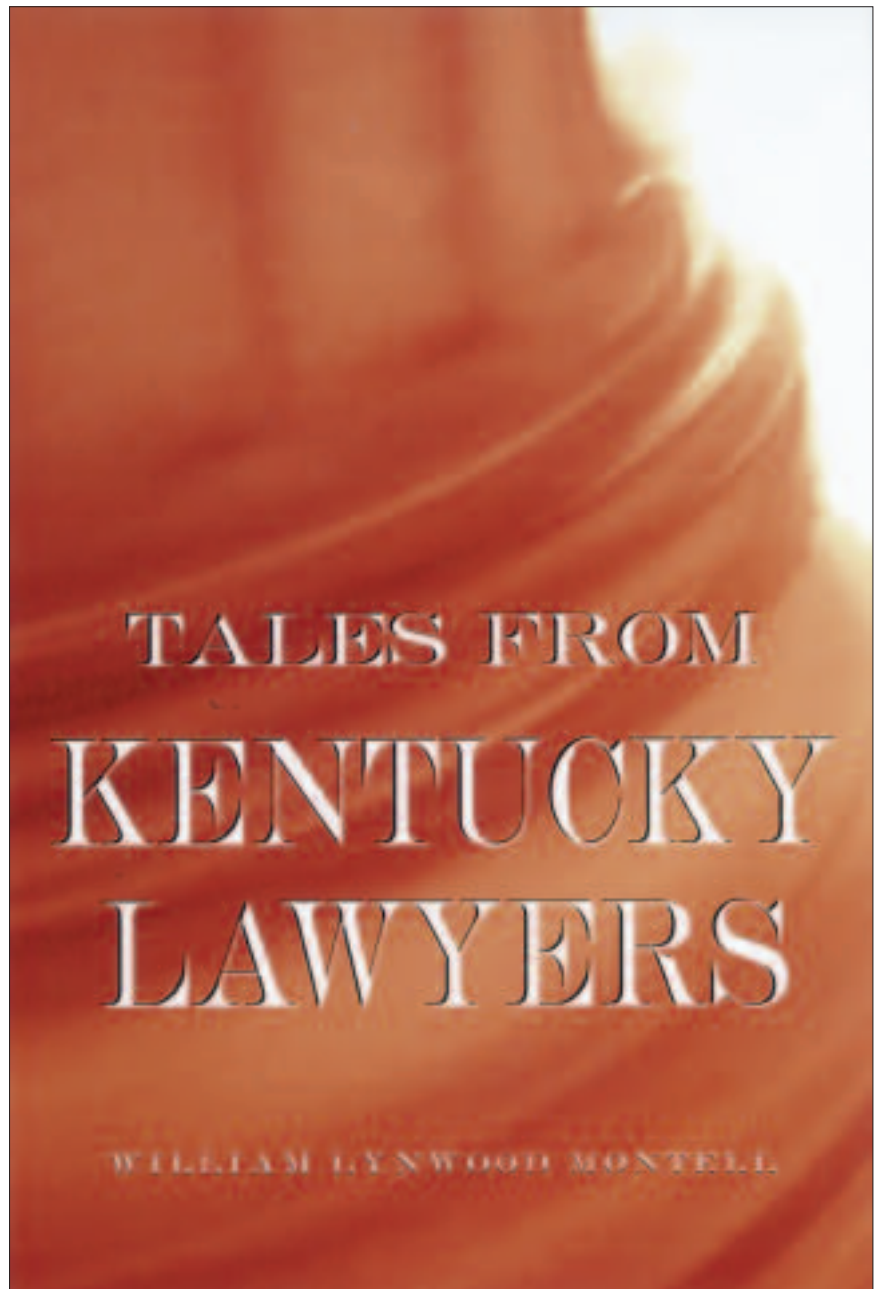
Fabled folklorist Lynwood Montell talked with more than three dozen Kentucky lawyers and judges and came away with hundreds of fascinating stories. We'll give you a taste.

Bar Stories

A good lawyer is a born storyteller. In *Tales from Kentucky Lawyers* (University Press of Kentucky, 2003) folklorist Lynwood Montell has collected 308 stories chosen from his extensive interviews with 39 Kentucky lawyers and judges. In the Introduction to *Tales*, Montell says he worked within two primary guidelines: that the interviewees should be middle-aged or older lawyers who practiced alone or in a small firm, and that they should be located in small to medium-sized towns and cities. His goal was to identify lawyers who had served a diverse clientele in a wide variety of cases. Younger attorneys and those working in large firms or cities are more likely to specialize in a particular area of law, limiting their storytelling range.

“In reading the stories herein,” Montell writes, “it will become immediately apparent that this is not a collection of lawyer jokes. Many of the stories are very funny, but many of them are also poignant in that they keenly affect people’s senses. Others are painful, even horrifying. The courts and the state’s legal system do not always see people at their best.

“If we should not be surprised to shed a tear at some of these stories, we likewise should not be surprised to laugh out loud at some. Humor is, and probably always will be, nature’s Prozac. How else could caring people survive day-in and day-out trying to solve the unsolvable and love the unlovable in order to keep the social fabric from unraveling or tearing irreparably.? Lawyers and judges, like the police, are on society’s front lines.”



Judge Buttin' In

My friend, Judge Bill Fuqua in Russellville, told me this. Said when you stop being a trial lawyer and go on the bench as a judge, you have to learn to be an arbitrator rather than a participant. We all have to go through that learning process, and one of the things that we have to learn is to not butt in, but just let the lawyers try their case and don't fall err to thinking that we can do it better than they can do it.

Judge Fuqua points that out by saying that he hadn't been on the bench very long until he was trying a case where a fight had ensued and the defendant was accused of taking a rock and bashing in the other fellow's head with it. Of course, according to the victim, that rock was half the size of Gibraltar, but to the defendant it wasn't any bigger than a BB shell. So the issue got to be how big was the rock. A bystander was called as a witness mainly to describe the size of the rock. But he wasn't a very articulate witness, and the lawyer was having a hard time getting him to say how big the rock was. So Judge Fuqua said that he watched it for a little while, then thought, "Well, I can do that better than he's doing it. I'm going to help him out."

Finally, he leans over and held up a paperweight, then says, "Now, Mr. Witness, I want you to tell the jury if that rock was bigger than this paperweight."

'Yes, sir, it was bigger than that.'

Then the judge held up a tape dispenser and said, "Well, was that rock bigger than this tape dispenser?"

"Yes, sir, it was bigger than that."

Then the judge asked, "Well, was that rock bigger than my head?"

The witness looked back at him, eyeballed him pretty good, and said, "Judge, it was about that long, but it wasn't that thick."

Fuqua said that was the last time he ever interfered.

—William R. Harris Franklin, August 22, 2001

A Lot of Testing

I think female attorneys are generally well accepted. I've had several men come in and state that they have chosen me because they thought it would look better to the court if they had a female attorney. That may be because our commissioner here is a female. In my 1993 graduating class at Chase College of Law, Northern Kentucky University, the number of men and the number of women was about fifty percent each.

Everything has gone well with me as a female attorney. In dealing with other attorneys, men who are my age just accept me outright. But some of the older men lawyers make me prove myself. I think they do a lot of testing to see if I really know what I am doing.

—Melanie A. Rolley, Madisonville,
April 15, 2002

Jury Trial Over Ear That Was Bitten Off

In law school, the professor was teaching us the danger of doing too much cross-examination of a hostile witness. The rule to be learned was that you never ask a question to which you don't already know the answer.

The defendant in the case that really occurred in east Kentucky involved a maiming. The defendant was charged with biting the victim's ear off in a bar-room fight.

The defense attorney asked the witness, "Did you actually see him bite off the victim's ear?"

The prosecution witness had to admit that he hadn't actually seen the ear bitten off.

At that point, the professor said that the attorney should have rested and stopped any further examination of the prosecution witness. But being full of self-confidence and pride in his success with the first question, he turned to the jury and in a very sarcastic voice with arms raised up to the heavens, shouted, "Well, if you didn't see him bite the ear off, just what did you see?"

The prosecution witness in a low voice responded, "I saw him spit it out."

—Stan Billingsley, Carrollton, March 20, 2001

**Lo and behold, as she
was going up the steps
to the second floor,
down those steps came
her wicked son-in-law
from California.**

Judge Fines Himself for Drunkenness

Back in the 1930s, a lawyer named Calvert was appointed Special Judge to preside over a term of circuit court in Harlan County. One morning, he ascended the bench, red-faced and trembling, and with a bang of the gavel he fined himself for drunkenness, and then adjourned the court. That incident was featured in newspapers all over the United States.

—Eugene Goss, Harlan, May 22, 2002

Overly Scared Deputy Sheriff

Victor Tackett was a brilliant man from Pikeville who was a great writer. But he was not a writer. He was just an ordinary kind of country fellow with a lot of intelligence, and he loved words. He was very bright. Looked like Andy Griffith's buddy Goober. Victor loved to fool with politics, and for a long time he was chief deputy sheriff to Sheriff Charles "Fuzzy" Keesee, who was a long-time sheriff of Pike County. In those days, he had as many as eight hundred deputies, and they all wore brown-shirted uniforms. Mr. Tackett said he wouldn't take five hundred dollars and wear one of them shirts through Murphy's, which was a dime store here. He didn't want to be seen in that kind of get-up. He was too proud. He usually wore a suit, but he did carry a .45 automatic pistol.

This story that I'm about to tell converges with another story. Another woman of letters in Pike County was Truda McCoy. She was a published poet and quite well known for her intellect and her poetry. But beneath it all, she was a mountain woman of old-time values. She came to see Jean Auxier, an old-time attorney whose life span was from about 1897 until about 1996, and told him a sad story. Jean Auxier was in the early stages of Alzheimer disease, and he kinda sat around about half-

asleep when he talked with his clients, and nodded and agreed with whatever they said. Didn't really pay much attention to them.

So she began to tell him, said, "Jean, I've got a son-in-law that's coming in from California, and he's been threatening to harm me and my family. You wouldn't let him do that, would you Jean?"

Well, Mr. Auxier just kinda mumbles, "No, no," under his breath.

She said, "If he was going to hurt you and your family, you would get him before he got you, wouldn't you Jean?"

Jean just kinda nodded, "Yeah, yeah."

She said, "Thank you," then got up and crossed the street to the courthouse. Now, this brings us back to Victor Tackett.

There was a workers' compensation hearing going on on the first floor of the old Pike County courthouse that was built in 1937. This hearing took place back during the early '70s.

Victor Tackett had been sent as a sort of bailiff for this workers' compensation hearing. Said he just sat there—didn't do anything. So he was there in his suit as the chief deputy sheriff of Pike County.

As Truda McCoy left Jean Auxier's office, she came into the courthouse,

and lo and behold, as she was going up the steps to the second floor, down those steps came her wicked son-in-law from California. She pulled out a pistol and shot him five times.

The Pike County courthouse was built of tile and concrete blocks, thus it is very sound and it echoed like a Martin guitar. And those five shots were fired within fifty feet of the workers' compensation hearing room, where Victor Tackett, the chief deputy sheriff, was at. Those five shots sounded like fifty shots bouncing around the walls.

Inside that workers' compensation hearing was Kelsey Friend Sr., the legendary black-lung lawyer of the mountains—also state senator. Gerald Jones, attorney from Prestonsburg, the judge in workers' compensation cases, was also there, along with another attorney perhaps, and the bailiff.

After all that banging noise (and those people got very disturbed), Truda McCoy ran into that room with that pistol smoking. Kelsey Friend dived under the table. The hearing officer jumped into a large trash can, and Chief Deputy Victor Tackett got up and ran out the back door, hollering, "Somebody call the law!"

And he, himself, was the chief deputy sheriff.

—Lawrence Webster, Pikeville,
November 9, 2000

The Truck Muffler That Wasn't

W e had been here approximately a year when I was attending court in front of Judge Clay. Judge Clay has since passed away. He was quite a rogue. He was a character. He liked to go out and live in the woods and shoot those long powder rifles. He frequently wore the garb of the era. He would preside over weddings in the woods among these long riflemen and out-in-the-country hunter types. On occasion he would come to court in bib overalls. Frequently he would come to court in bib overalls and not even have a T-shirt underneath. He was just an absolute rogue. He was a veteran of World War II. He was a short, stocky man, a former prosecutor, highly countrified, yet highly educated. But he really understood people and connected with them very nicely. People did love him, although frequently he could be tough.

One hot summer July day he was on the bench and the traffic docket was backed up just as always. The courtroom was full of people, which probably added to the heat as we sat there. I guess we were all looking for that one levity of humanity that might otherwise break the misery. At that point, this young country boy was called up from the back of the courtroom. Judge Clay, who considered everybody under fifty-five to be his own child, called him up. Well, this great big six-foot-four country boy went and stood before the judge. Judge Clay asked him, "Now, honey, what kind of trouble have you gotten into?"

The young fellow said, "Judge, this is an absolute travesty of justice."

The judge said, "Well, what happened?"

"Well, I was driving down Main Street and a city policeman pulled me over." Said, "I've got the ticket right here. I've got the proof right here. They charged me with having a defective muffler."

The judge said, "Well now, honey, why is that so upsetting?"

The boy said, "Well, everybody who knows me knows that I've had that truck for years and it's never had a muffler on it. It couldn't possibly be defective."

Well, the court burst into absolute pandemonium. The judge said, "Well, that's as good an argument as any." He slammed the gavel down and said, "Not guilty," and sent him out of the courtroom.

—Keith McCormick, Morehead, June 22, 2000

Prisoner Attitudes

I always emphasize in court to these defendants that they're never going to straighten up until they take the full responsibility for their conduct. You blame Mama, you blame your wife, you blame your defense lawyer, you blame this, you blame that. I get one or two letters a day from prison or jail. I can read that letter and tell you right now where this guy is going, because if he is still blaming other people, he's not going to make it until he accepts full responsibility.

There was this old convict that I ran into once in the penitentiary. I was doing some investigation on a case and this convict was a witness. He wasn't being charged. He was just a witness. I called him in to talk to him, as I always do. I enjoy talking with those old cons—just sit around and shoot the bull. We were sitting there talking, and he got ready to leave and got up, said, "You know, I'm not guilty for what I'm serving this time for. But, you know, I've gotten away with so much in my life, who am I to complain?"

Yeah, he said he wasn't guilty but that he wasn't complaining. He figured that he had it coming after all he'd done and got away with.

—Bill Cunningham, Eddyville, January 21, 2002

Elderly Whiskey Maker

B ack in the 1930's, Judge Church Ford sentenced a seventy-year-old man to jail the third time for moonshining. He imposed a stern ten-year sentence, whereupon the defendant complained, "Judge, I'm seventy years old. I can't pull a sentence like that."

Judge Ford, who was known for his total lack of humor, replied, "Well, do all of it you can."

—Eugene Goss, Harlan, May 22, 2002

**"You know, I'm not guilty
for what I'm serving this
time for. But, you know,
I've gotten away with so
much in my life, who
am I to complain?"**

Reprinted from *Tales from Kentucky Lawyers* by William Lynwood Montell, published by the University of Kentucky Press ©2003. By permission of the publisher and the author.

Three New Members Join KHC Board

The Kentucky Humanities Council has welcomed three new members to its Board of Directors. They were elected by the standing Board to three-year terms renewable for three more years. In



Wil James



Brigitte LaPresto



Mike Philipps

addition to representing the Council in their home areas, these new members will help set policy, review grant applications, and raise money for the more than 400 public

humanities programs KHC supports every year.

Wil James (Georgetown) is Vice President of Manufacturing at Toyota

Motor Manufacturing Kentucky, Inc. He oversees all vehicle manufacturing. A native of Norfolk, Virginia, James holds a B.S. in mechanical engineering from Old Dominion University.

Brigitte LaPresto (Pikeville) has taught at Pikeville College since 1987. She is a professor of English and chair of the college's humanities division. LaPresto earned her doctorate in English at Bowling Green State University.

Mike Philipps (Northern Kentucky) has been editor of the *Kentucky Post* and *Cincinnati Post* since May 2001. He joined the *Post* in 1977 as a reporter. Philipps grew up in Ohio and is a 1968 graduate of the Virginia Military Institute. ☺

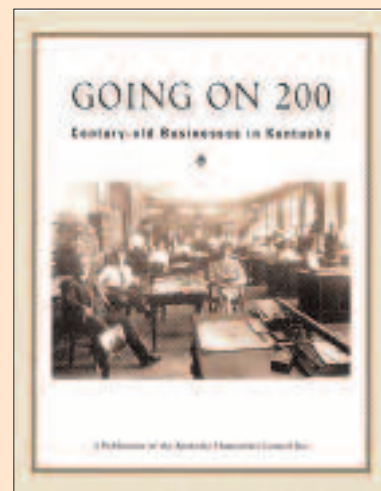
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Eben Henson greeted the audience every night, and never forgot to ask for donations. In 2004, the Playhouse's ten-week season drew a total audience of more than 10,000. The theater's annual budget is about \$250,000. Its economic impact on Boyle County is estimated at \$700,000 a year.

The Show Goes On

Pioneer Playhouse founder Eben Henson died in 2004. His family is carrying on the summer theater he started 55 years ago—on the grounds of a mental hospital.

At the end of World War II, the U.S. Navy gave Eben Henson a check for \$3000 in back pay. He returned to his hometown of Danville, Kentucky, bought a fancy Chrysler convertible, finished college in record time, and headed to New York to study acting.

2005 Schedule

On the Razzle: June 11-25

Squabbles: June 28-July 9

The Man Who Came to Dinner:

July 12-July 23

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He enrolled in drama classes at the New School for Social Research. His classmates included Bea Arthur, Tony Curtis, and Harry Belafonte. Their destiny, as we now know, was stardom of the conventional sort. Eben Henson's fate was to become a star of a different kind, a beacon of regional theater whose light shone far beyond central Kentucky.

Henson's acting career had barely begun when he was called home on account of his father's ill health. Leaving New York, he wrote that as he looked out the bus window "my thoughts, dreams, expectations vanished as quickly as the skyline disappeared. It was as if I'd never been there." Back in Danville, Henson ran the family hotel and looked after his father's real estate holdings. When he said one of his New York teachers had predicted he could become a star, his father replied, "A star is nothing but a mass of hot gas."

But Eben was not done with the theater. He soon noticed that Darnell, the nearby state mental hospital, had an unused 500-seat auditorium. When the hospital's chief psychiatrist told him that many of the patients were so poor they couldn't buy candy or cigarettes at the canteen, Henson saw an opening. In return for use of the hospital's theater, he would give patients a percentage of the ticket sales to use as spending money. The state approved the deal and Henson began making the rounds of civic clubs in Danville, asking who would buy a season ticket to a summer theater. Everyone raised their hands. Believing the revenue would be there, he went to New York and hired a troupe of actors, whose pay would be forty percent of the gate.

That first season was almost derailed before it began by a series of crises. Henson's father died, his long-time girlfriend suddenly married someone else, and the Internal Revenue Service came calling with a lot of time-consuming questions. Perhaps even worse, most of those people who had raised their hands and said they'd buy season tickets—didn't. Despite all that, the Pioneer Playhouse opened in May 1950. Local dignitaries and politicians, folksinger John Jacob Niles, and Miss America 1944 joined an audience of 200 for Noel Coward's sophisticated comedy *Blihe Spirit*.



Eben Henson with Eva Marie Saint, one of the stars of Raintree County, a big-budget Civil War epic that was filmed in Danville in 1956, due mainly to Henson's Hollywood connections.



Above: The Pioneer Playhouse moved to its current site in 1957. Eben Henson built much of the facility, often with materials rescued from renovations and demolitions.

Left: Lee Majors (shown here) and John Travolta are among the actors who hit it big after getting their first professional theater experience at the Playhouse.

On most nights during that first season, the company played to paying audiences of 25 to 50, plus many (non-paying) patients from the mental hospital. As the season drew to a close, the actors weren't exactly thrilled with their share of the gate, and Henson was broke. He went to his bank, the local grocery store, the gas station—any place he thought he could get credit or a loan. The hometown folks came through.

He was able to finish the season and, despite his losses, quickly began making plans for the next year, which in the blink of an eye turned into the next 53 years.

Until his death in 2004, Henson poured his unique blend of passion, persistence and persuasiveness into the Pioneer Playhouse. By his side every step of the way was his wife Charlotte, who also worked tirelessly to create a

Kentucky institution that has been noticed, praised, and emulated nationwide. Its 56th season will begin June 11, 2005 (see box for schedule). Holly Henson, Eben and Charlotte's oldest daughter, took over as artistic director in 2004. She says Pioneer Playhouse carries on in Eben Henson's can-do spirit. "It is an amazing success story," says Holly Henson, "because you wouldn't have thought it would endure. It was cobbled together from bits and pieces of this and that. Dad literally begged, borrowed and kidnapped every single item, but to think that it has touched people's hearts for over 55 years and continues to do so—it's just beautiful." Kentuckians love summer theater, Henson says, and she believes Pioneer Playhouse can continue to be dynamic and relevant. "We can bring experiences to the community that they couldn't find anywhere else. The community needs us and we need them. I'd like to see us work together to keep Pioneer Playhouse alive." 🍷

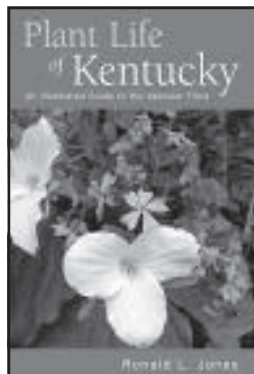


This hospital in Danville, Kentucky was the Pioneer Playhouse's first home.

Information in this article comes from a history of Pioneer Playhouse by Holly Henson.

Photographs by Eben and Charlotte Henson

The University Press of **KENTUCKY**



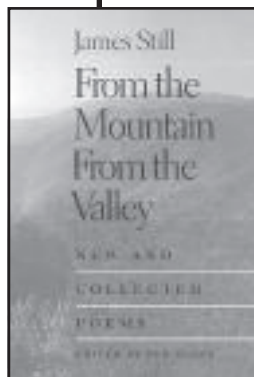
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