Kentucky humanities

October 2005
Kentucky Humanities Council Inc.

Inventing the Horse Farm *page 3*

Why do horse farms look this way? The credit goes to an extraordinary Kentuckian named R. A. Alexander.

Happy Birthday, Red! *page 17*

Robert Penn Warren, the greatest writer Kentucky has produced, was born in 1905. We celebrate his 100th birthday with his classic short story, "Blackberry Winter."

Plus:
The Name Game
Terror in the Air
Poetry by H. R. Stoneback

In Memoriam

Dr. Thomas Dionysius Clark

July 14, 1903–June 28, 2005

Before we sent our 2005-06 Whole Humanities Catalog to the printer in June, we made one last, sad edit—to remove Dr. Thomas Clark's name from our Speakers Bureau. He had been on our roster since the beginning of this popular program almost twenty years ago. And he had been a friend and supporter of the Humanities Council since the beginning. He was one of our founders, one of five Kentuckians who went to Washington in 1972 for a briefing on a new initiative by the National Endowment for the Humanities to establish state-based affiliates. Dr. Clark and his colleagues came home convinced Kentucky would benefit greatly from such an organization, and soon we were open for business. Dr. Clark was always ready to help the Council achieve its mission in any way he could, in word, thought and deed. In addition to being one of our most popular speakers, he wrote for us, endorsed our work, and signed countless books for our benefit. Most recently, he contributed the introduction to our book *Going on 200: Century-Old Businesses in Kentucky*, published the month of his 100th birthday.

Dr. Clark's good will was boundless, his intellect unfailing, his curiosity uncommon, and his life a gift to us all for generations to come.

Just a few days after his death, the Kentucky History Center was dedicated in Dr. Clark's name. He was instrumental in the creation of this splendid facility, just as he played a key role in the creation of the state archives, and in acquiring the funding for the William T. Young Library at the University of Kentucky. He worked tirelessly on behalf of the University Press of Kentucky (and Mississippi, his native state), and just weeks prior to his death, he was helping organize, for archiving, two important collections of historic papers.

Thomas D. Clark's spirit was indomitable, and his love of Kentucky, Kentucky history, and Kentuckians was abiding. Just meeting him was a memorable experience. A person perfectly suited for his calling in life, Dr. Clark is said to have taught over 25,000 students. If you ever invited him and Mrs. Clark to lunch, to an outing at Keeneland, or to attend a humanities program in a far Kentucky county, you know how gladly he greeted countless former students, civic leaders, or readers of his many books about the Commonwealth. Dr. Clark's good will was boundless, his intellect unfailing, his curiosity uncommon, and his life a gift to us all for generations to come.

Ed de Rosset

Dr. Thomas D. Clark at age 100 in 2003

A True Friend of the Humanities

The Cover: Photograph of Manchester Farm, Fayette County, Kentucky, by Sid Webb.

Page 3

Page 13

Page 17

October 2005

Kentucky humanities

FEATURES

DEPARTMENTS

Kentucky Humanities is published in April & October by the Kentucky Humanities Council, Inc., 206 East Maxwell St., Lexington, KY 40508-2613 (859/257-5932). KHC is an independent, nonprofit affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities in Washington, D.C., and provides more than 400 public humanities programs for Kentuckians every year. Supporters of the Council's programs receive *Kentucky Humanities* by mail. Views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the KHC Board and staff. For information on our very favorable advertising rates, please call Charles Thompson at 859/257-5932.

Nicknames Galore

From Lick Skillet to Wild Kitchen, there are countless tasty nicknames for Kentucky places

Many Kentucky places have, or have had over the years, more than one name. Usually one is a formal name, officially recorded in a government document or on a published map. Another may be a nickname, often humorous. Many times the origins of these nicknames are no longer known though we may assume there were definite reasons for them—some event or characteristic of local residents or of the area's physical environment, something connected with the place or its residents. Sometimes the original or official name has been forgotten and the nickname alone remains, identifying the place and becoming, in effect, its official name. With extinct places, a nickname may be all that's remembered about the place for even its official name may be forgotten.

My recent re-examination of Wayne County place names revealed some examples in a section of the county called Cabell Ridge. The Cabell Ridge area has had several nicknames, including Seedtick, Dogwood, and Wild Kitchen. The late Garnett Walker, the county's leading historian, said he learned about Wild Kitchen from Martin Shearer, a descendant of the people involved in the tale he told:

"A group of settlers came to Kentucky from Virginia to set up camp at this spot on the ridge. During one of their early nights there their horses wandered off. Since horses were very valuable to Kentucky's early pioneers (this was way back around 1815 or 1820) they knew they had to find them or they'd be in deep trouble. So the men of the group (all of them) left their families and pursued their horses all the way back to their old Virginia homes. Their wives and children, of course, were left behind on the ridge to fend for themselves. But, like most Kentucky pioneers, they were a hardy lot and knew what to do to survive. They set up camp and lived there 'under the timber,' as it were. They had an outdoor kitchen and the wives took turns planning and preparing their meals. This earned the nickname Wild Kitchen. Months later the men returned with their horses and found their families totally adjusted to their new way of life. The community there became Wild Kitchen and so did the local school. Years later the local post office was established as Cabell and the school and ridge were also given this official name. But oldtimers still remember the Wild Kitchen and the story behind it."

Sometimes the original or official name has been forgotten and the nickname alone remains, identifying the place and becoming, in effect, its official name.

Every part of Kentucky has had its share of nicknames. Although the community on Elliott County's Mauk Ridge was called Stark by its early settlers after the Revolutionary War officer under whom their forebears had served, it may have also been called Egypt, for people would come from miles around to buy grain. (This is according to local man Harve Mobley, then living in Washington, D.C., in a letter to the late Wallace J. Williamson and shared with me.)

The farming area around Sassafras Ridge in Fulton County derived its nickname, The Delta, from its resemblance to the area along the Mississippi River farther south. Nearby Crutchfield was sometimes called Slapout and also Alexander (for the man who ran the local rail depot).

Casey County's Ferndale was once called Poodle-Doo. And the old post office and now extinct community of Linnie in Casey County was once called Pluckum. Linnie was centered on a factory producing wagon spokes and neck yokes, but I can't see how this would account for its nickname. Perhaps some day I'll learn how.

Here are some other Kentucky nicknames I hope to learn about: Pokeberry (for Mariba in Menifee Co.), Dogtown (for Blythe in Monroe Co.), Goosetown (for Hiseville in Barren Co.), Grabell (for Kirkmansville in Todd Co.), Lick Skillet (for Perry Park in Owen Co., and Sweet Owen for that county as a whole), Crackers Neck (for Newfoundland in Elliott Co.), Hells Corner (for Morris Fork in Breathitt Co.), Whiskers (for Crestwood in Oldham Co.), Loafersburg (for Pierce in Green Co.), Slabtown (for Symsonia in Graves Co., which suggests it was where the local sawmill workers lived), Struttsville (for Keefer in Grant Co.), Dobetter (for Dugantown in Barren Co.), and Frogtown (for Miranda in Nicholas Co.)

And we can't forget that Prestonsburg in Floyd County, where I live, is locally known as Pburg, and Hopkinsville in Christian County has often had to endure Hoptown, just as Indianapolis was known to those of us who used to live near there as Naptown. Chicago has long been the Windy City, and that's what some folks in Wayne County wanted to call their post office. They settled for just plain Windy, fearing that mail addressed to them would be missent to that other place. ●

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

BY DENNIS DOMER

Why do the horse farms that make Kentucky famous look the way they do? The credit goes to a visionary named Robert Aitcheson Alexander.

Inventing the Horse Farm

The equine landscape is Kentucky's calling card around the world. Thanks to television, magazine articles and advertising, the horse farm with its manicured vistas has become the internationally recognized symbol of Kentucky and its signature industry. The serene beauty of the horse farms attracts tourists and, more important to the industry, buyers—for the best horses money can buy and for the landscape itself.

A few farms do not an equine landscape make—a critical mass is necessary. In Kentucky's central bluegrass region, there are more than one thousand farms that specialize in the breeding, raising, boarding, and training of Thoroughbreds, Standardbreds, and other kinds of horses. Centered in Lexington and covering perhaps 100,000 acres, mainly in Fayette, Woodford, Bourbon, Scott, Jessamine and Clark counties, these hundreds of horse farms weave a tapestry—a striking, park-like equine landscape of rolling hills, curving historic pikes, rushing streams, miles of rock and plank fences, sinuously

Sid Webb

Horse farms are designed for horse business. Looking good helps the bottom line.

rounded paddocks, undulating tree-lined lanes, sumptuous barns with racing spires, sculptured gates, and plantation-like mansions.

The views are entrancing even to those who have seen them many times. A newcomer, though, after a tour of central Kentucky, might be forgiven for wondering if there's a state law mandating how horse farms are supposed to look—because they do look much alike. In addition to sharing the typical topography, geology, and botany of the region, they possess a typical spatial organization with the same landscape elements appearing over and over. These elements interconnect to create a coherent image of what a Kentucky horse farm is, and to produce the fastest horses for the most valuable stakes races in the world.

Why do horse farms look that way? There's no state law, but there is a long-standing tradition. Unlike many traditions, the origin of this one is not lost in the mists of history. The equine landscape we see today closely follows the model created 150 years ago by Robert Aitcheson Alexander. Alexander, who died in 1867, was the master of Woodburn Farm in Woodford County, and it is not going too far to call him the inventor of the horse farm as we know it today.

The equine landscape we see today closely follows the model created 150 years ago by Robert Aitcheson Alexander. It is not going too far to call him the inventor of the horse farm as we know it today.

Horse Farming Comes to Kentucky

The horse and its landscape have played a long and substantial role in American and English history. Boadicea, the Celtic queen who raced her chariots on the heaths of East Anglia during the first century, provided the model for English hunting and racing traditions that are still observed. A later host of rulers avidly embraced the "Sport of Kings" and supported the development of a manicured and luxurious equine landscape in eastern England around villages such as Newmarket, where rolling picturesque landscapes are divided into fenced enclosures of rock and hedge amid broad vistas framed by widely scattered trees. By the mid-seventeenth century this landscape had become the focus of breeding, raising, training, and racing expensive blooded horses—an enterprise that remains one of the primary pastimes of the English elite.

The English gentry who settled the new world in the seventeenth century brought their equine pastimes with them. The blooded horse was a significant presence in their colonial cultures and plantation landscapes. New York, Virginia, South Carolina, and Maryland were the initial centers of racing interests, and breeders in Virginia and Maryland had produced notable stocks of horses by the era of the American Revolution. After the revolution, a significant number of these gentlemen pushed beyond the Allegheny Mountains into the land that became known as the Bluegrass.

The roots of some of the most important visual components of Kentucky's equine landscape can be found back in Virginia, especially the white plank fencing and spired cupola which appear in several early paintings of George Washington's Mount Vernon Estate, one of the most venerated landscapes of colonial America. Americans idolized Washington, who was a dedicated horseman. Mt. Vernon, the model utilitarian plantation, served as an early American ideal for all gentlemen farmers to follow, particularly during the first half of the nineteenth century when the agrarian landscape of Kentucky began to take shape.

Central Kentucky turned out to be a natural paradise for the horse. "In the first periods of the settlement of the country," Timothy Flint pointed out in 1832, "it was covered with thick cane brake, which has disappeared and has been replaced by a beautiful grass sward of a peculiar cast even in the forest." The gigantic canebrakes died out rather quickly after settlement because they could not survive heavy grazing and burning, and in their absence natural grasses invaded, followed by the foreign invader, blue grass from Europe.

Blue grass is a robust plant with more than fifty varieties, and it is adaptable. By 1625 English settlers had brought this seed to the North American continent. Early Kentucky farmers knew this grass from their Virginia experience, and they planted it over most other varieties because it flourished in the sun, rain, and humidity of central Kentucky. It had a high protein value too, and by the late nineteenth century, Kentucky horsemen calculated that this blue grass made young horses mature a whole year sooner than other grasses.

Despite Kentucky's enthusiasm and passion for the science of breeding and racing horses, focusing strictly on horse farming was always difficult because, with few exceptions, this specialized business has never been a reliably profitable one, and is a relatively recent creation. Horse ventures were particularly risky because of the fragilities of the creature and the unpredictability of racing. To survive, nearly every farm in the nineteenth century, and many farms in the twentieth century, for that matter, chose to breed a variety of livestock in addition to horses. Cattle, mules, hogs, and sheep have always been a safer investment than blooded horses. Henry Clay, John Breckinridge, and other gentleman farmers made significant contributions to horse breeding and racing in such a mixed farming environment.

The earliest known farmer to restrict his breeding business to horses alone was A. Keene Richards (1827-1881), who inherited a fortune from his

father's cotton and sugar investments. With more than $200,000 surplus a year to invest in Blue Grass Park, his farm in Scott County near Georgetown, Richards became so fascinated with improving the blooded horse that he even journeyed to the Middle East to find the purest of breeds. For all these efforts, however, he would have little impact on the evolution of the horse industry or on the development and organization of the specialized equine landscape that would emerge during the second half of the nineteenth century. That would be the domain of R. A. Alexander.

R. A. Alexander Invents the Horse Farm

During the 1850s, R. A. Alexander made many extraordinary innovations in the horse business and equine landscape at Woodburn Farm, a Woodford County tract that eventually extended to more than 3,000 acres. In his authoritative *Racing in America*, author John Hervey devoted a chapter to Woodburn Farm. Before Alexander, Hervey wrote, the horse industry was a "sheer adventure" and breeding a "side issue" based on an old idea that "gentlemen should not make a business of breeding." In *The Thoroughbred Record* Hervey observed that:

> "Mr. Alexander was a pioneer and foundation-layer. Woodburn was the first great American stud farm that was organized upon thoroughly intelligent and systematic principles. Hitherto, the great breeders had proceeded along the go-as-you-please, old-fashioned, more or less capricious and intensively personal lines."

In 1860, a reporter described Woodburn as a farm that "goes on with the regularity of clock-work." Clockwork operation, high style, and a unique look literally put Woodburn on the agricultural map. Reporters out of New York City visited the farm frequently, and after Alexander published his first yearling catalog in 1857, so did the country's most important Thoroughbred and Standardbred owners.

Spectacularly educated and very rich, Robert Aitcheson Alexander knew no limits as he drew on the best ideas of the day as well as his knowledge of the horse business to create Woodburn, his model farm. (From a portrait by Jean Lacretelle)

During the period before the start of the Civil War in 1861, other horse farms in the Bluegrass competed with Woodburn in the business of blooded stock, but none matched the large scale operation Alexander had designed. Still, they were essential to the formation of the larger equine landscape. A group of horse farms within a six-mile area in Woodford County, with Woodburn Farm at the center, formed the first critical mass. This group included George Blackburn's Equira, General Abraham Buford's Bosque Bonita Farm, W. F. and Frank Harper's Nantura Stud Farm, Daniel Swigert's Stockwood, and Warren Viley's Stone Wall. Other competitors scattered outside this central mass of farms. Woodburn set the standard, and all of the antebellum horse farms that survived into the post-civil war and Victorian era—a period of intense equine landscape building—followed the landscape aesthetic and organization they saw at Woodburn.

Robert A. Alexander built Woodburn Farm starting with 921 acres purchased from his siblings, who had inherited this land from their father in 1841. At the time of his father's death, R. A., who was born in Woodford County, Kentucky in 1819, was in school in England, where he earned a degree from Cambridge University. Always privileged because he was a descendant of the English gentry, he became one of the richest young men in the world when he inherited his Uncle William's Scottish estate. (To claim this inheritance, Alexander had to renounce his American citizenship and become a British subject, which he remained the rest of his life.) Young Alexander could have remained in Scotland to superintend his vast holdings there; instead, after nine years in Britain, he returned to Kentucky in 1849 and set out to create the most advanced farm in the United States.

The innovations in the business organization, landscape, and building arrangements at Woodburn Farm were revolutionary because they were based on formal in-depth study and a scientific knowledge of farming and farm landscapes, especially equine landscapes, which few people in the United States could match. After returning from England in 1849, R.A. revisited Europe in the early 1850s for two years to study farm operations in England, France, and Germany. While other gentleman farmers in Kentucky did not experience this kind of extended educational opportunity, they did understand the value of traveling to Europe to learn the best practices. Many of them took a shorter Grand Tour to purchase blooded stock for importation back into Kentucky. Like a modern-day Noah, Alexander himself imported several shiploads of animals from England and the continent.

The landscape at Woodburn Farm was based on the philosophical knowledge,

Developed by Danae Peckler and Craig Hardy

These were Alexander's holdings in Woodford County at the height of his career as a farm builder.

multiple scientific discoveries and aesthetic ideas that emerged from the Enlightenment and remained influential among the educated classes well into the late nineteenth century. These included Mendel's experiments in genetics, von Humboldt's naturalist classification systems, Darwin's theory of evolution, and the musings of a string of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century English garden theorists and practitioners who cultivated various ideas of the picturesque landscape created through human intervention in nature. Alexander would have studied these thinkers at Cambridge, and seen landscapes based on their ideas during his travels. The landscape he developed at Woodburn not only served to produce superior livestock—it also created a style that would become associated with winners in the nation's great horse races and with the superior social rank of Kentucky's finest gentlemen farmers. R. A.'s vision prevailed during the late nineteenth century and continues to do so in the twenty-first in part because it expressed so well the high standards that he himself embodied, and that the horse farming business still embraces as its ideal.

Built in the 1850s, the entrance to Woodburn Farm was a model for horse farm gates in the Bluegrass.

Not surprisingly, creating a farm whose iconic power has lasted more than 150 years kept Alexander very busy. "He has many barns and stables, and is building many more of great solidity and convenience," a writer for the *Spirit of the Times* exclaimed in 1856. "He has small enclosed fields and paddocks for his stock near the buildings, and is constantly adding to them. He has adopted a grand plan of stone enclosure and water accommodation which, when carried out and perfected, will probably make Woodburn one of the most complete stock estates in America." According to a reporter who visited Woodburn in 1860, Alexander built at a furious pace: "Mr. Alexander has stone-masons, brick-makers, carpenters, blacksmiths, etc. constantly working upon his estate, which will one day, if the present owner lives, be the most magnificent country seat in the United States, and perhaps in the world."

The landscape he developed at Woodburn not only served to produce superior livestock—it also created a style that would become associated with winners in the nation's great horse races and with the superior social rank of Kentucky's finest gentlemen farmers.

To construct his landscape vision with its higher purposes, R. A. Alexander made a number of significant changes in the pioneer landscape that his father's generation had built. They continue to play out in the equine landscape today.

Fencing

The first change was fencing, one of the most essential elements of any equine landscape. Alexander made dramatic improvements upon the settlement era fences. He had rock walls built about five feet high on both sides of old Frankfort Pike as it ran through Woodburn, as well as along all the other perimeters of the farm. Built by Irish immigrants, these fences ensured that Alexander's bloodstock would remain pure, a basic tenant of his business at a time when thousands of animals were driven to market and compromised by many strays.

Ironically, these rock fences and the equine landscape emerging with them were far more rational and reliable than the risky Thoroughbred horse business. The quality of the fences and the landscape they protected gave the helpful impression that horse farmers who had them knew exactly what they were doing. To the consuming public, the fences represented solidity, reliability, and predictability. By the turn of the twentieth century, the rock fence had become a visual icon of the Bluegrass—the foundation stones of the first formal-

Most nineteenth-century stone fences are now backed up by plank fences.

ized equine landscape. While the owners of elite horse farms continued to build various types of rock fences several decades into the twentieth century, most farmers eventually tore them down to accommodate increased mechanization and reduce maintenance costs. This makes the surviving rock fences even more powerful symbols of the equine landscape.

As Alexander revised his fencing, he removed the split rail worm fences from his property because they were unsightly, protected weeds, were prone to rot and represented the homespun vernacular, the opposite of high breeding. He replaced them with rock fences on the periphery of the farm, and used plank fencing—oak is the most durable—for the internal fences that formed a complex pattern of interlocking paddocks, lanes, and pastures.

We do not know whether Alexander painted his plank fences white, but paintings of the Oakland Race Course as early as 1839 suggest that white was the preferred color there. By 1872, the white fence was becoming a Bluegrass icon, as a painting of Silver Lake Farm in Harrison County illustrates. White fences, however, proved to be expensive, and today black paint has replaced white on many miles of plank fence in the Bluegrass. Black paint has an asphalt base, deters cribbing, and is easier to maintain. White and black are not the only colors today, though. The late horse farm expert, Joe Taylor, noted that he had seen "almost every other color."

Whatever the color, fences of almost any kind make up one of the biggest maintenance expenses a horse farmer faces. Plank fences must be replaced at least five times each century, no matter how well they are maintained. The only fences that have any age on the landscape are the few rock fences left over from the nineteenth century or early twentieth century. Now they are more ornamental than pragmatic because they are usually no longer adequate to keep expensive horses in their pastures.

Ironically, these rock fences and the equine landscape emerging with them were far more rational and reliable than the risky Thoroughbred horse business.

Farm Divisions

According to his "grand plan," Alexander divided his more than 3,000 acres of "first rate" land into sections designed for specific animals. This plan represented a dramatic transformation from the farm he had inherited from his father, who mixed his stock in all manner of fields. R.A. made north, east, and south divisions of his farm (later named Woodburn, Airdrie, and Lanark), separating Thoroughbreds, Standardbreds, cattle, and sheep into different parts of the farm. Within these divisions he built houses for his managers, clustering them with barns and other outbuildings for efficient management, especially of stallions. He built relatively small paddocks and pastures close to the barns, and used woodland pastures for horses and open pastures for cattle.

Managers operated their divisions as carefully planned animal factories. At Woodburn, the Standardbred became established as a separate breed of horse with its own pedigree lines. Alexander also bred Southdown sheep and Ayrshire, Alderny and Shorthorn cattle as well as Thoroughbred horses. Every part of the landscape was molded to the varying habits and needs of these different breeds. Dividing farms into divisions is a typical practice today on large horse farms.

Specialized Buildings and Structures Clustered Strategically

Alexander and his successors built various clusters over the past 150 years, usually based on the type of operation more than the type of horse. Some typical clusters include:

- Main house or tenant house—stallion barn—breeding shed—stallion paddock office—show ring—loading docks

- Main house—training track—breaking ring—lunging ring—paddocks
- Tenant house—yearling barns—pastures—paddocks
- Tenant house—mare/foal barns—warming shed—pastures
- Maintenance sheds—blacksmith shop—hay sheds—special horse sheds

tion of houses on horse farms is very much a part of the larger equine landscape throughout the Bluegrass today. Some horse farms also benefited from clusters of private housing in hamlets located at their edges; more than twenty of these clusters grew up around Lexington in the late nineteenth century.

Alexander did not skimp on his clustered barns and stables. In 1865, a reporter for *Turf, Field and Farm* exclaimed over "Mr. Alexander's farm, with its vast stables of cut stone for his horses and cattle, and his beautiful dairy houses of the same material." These barns were carefully sited and planned for ventilation, and they were "perfect models of cleanliness and order." Several of R. A.'s barns are still standing. They include an archetypical center-aisle stall barn and central aisle training barn. Barns with central aisles are distributed throughout many European countries and their American colonies, and are the most frequent horse barn types in the Bluegrass today.

Stallion barns, as a specialized building type, began to develop with the establishment of stud businesses like Alexander's, although none of his stallion barns survive. (Some ruins do remain of a barn that may have protected the famous stallion Lexington when William Quantrell and Sue Mundy raided Woodburn for horses during the Civil War.) Because they have specialized functions and internal spatial arrangements, stallion barns are usually set apart in their own cluster. Although often smaller than barns used for yearlings and mares with foals, stallion barns are relatively more expensive because they must also be impressive, showcases fit for "kings" with their sizable stud fees.

In 1905, Charles Trevathan wrote that "the amount of money which has gone into the state through the thoroughbred horse alone is beyond computation."

Not all buildings were clustered, however. Many barns, especially converted tobacco barns, were built to stand alone on hills for good ventilation and drainage.

There were numerous houses and main houses on all three divisions of Woodburn. Alexander lived in a 1790 rambling log residence on the south side of Frankfort Pike that his father built. Now part of Lanark Farm, it was situated in an upland plantation landscape with the house at the end of a lane articulated with edge trees. In full view from his house he placed a stallion barn and two training tracks.

There were many houses for Alexander's substantial labor force as well. Already in 1860, according to the *Spirit of the Times*, "each of the superintendents and the trainer (6 or more in all) has a comfortable residence." Each superintendent had a staff, composed of leased slave laborers who, when freed, stayed in numerous smaller tenant houses. (As a British citizen, Alexander could not own slaves, so he leased them.) This proliferation

Specialization in Breeding

Designing the farm as an effective interlocking series of discreet spaces and structures allowed Alexander to breed horses on a large scale and to specialize. In 1857, Alexander retired from racing horses, to focus entirely on breeding and selling, and his business became several times larger. In 1897 in *The Horse of America in his Derivance, History and Development*, John H. Wallace wrote that Woodburn

> "was the agricultural sensation of the period, and everybody, from one end

Greg Fitzsimmons and Michael Jacobs, 2000

These Gainesway Farm stallion barns, winners of a national design award from the American Institute of Architects, are emblematic of the modern industrialized breeding operation.

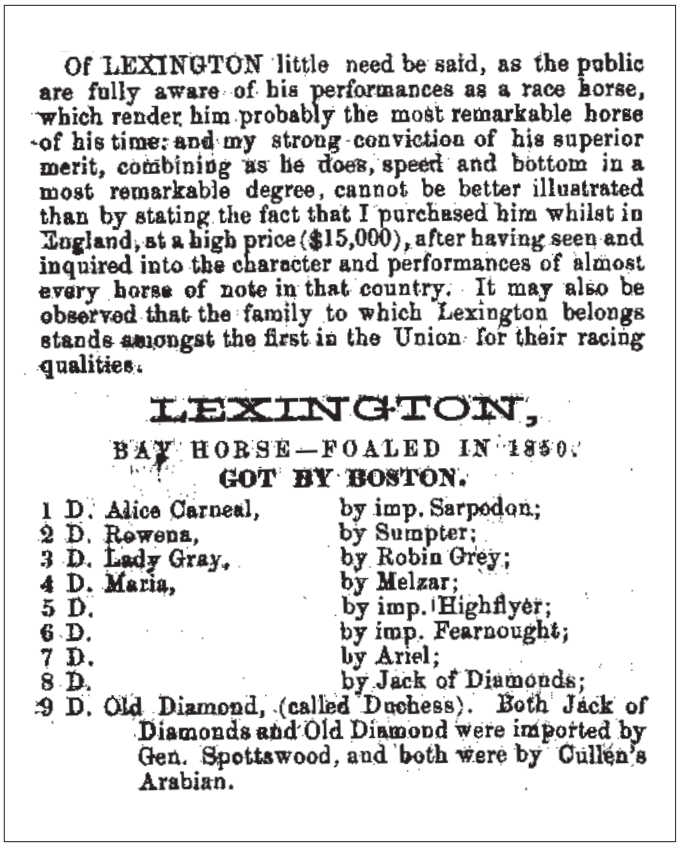
of the land to the other, soon knew of and applauded the great enterprise. There had been great enterprises on similar lines before, and there have been even greater since, but Mr. Alexander's Woodburn Farm, of Kentucky, may always be looked upon as the real pioneer in stock breeding on a large and methodical scale, and without limit as to resources."

In his Thoroughbred division Alexander had four Thoroughbred stallions including the great Lexington, 93 brood mares, and 54 weanling colts. In another division there were four Standardbred stallions, 26 trotting brood mares, and 18 weanling trotting colts. From 1857 to 1888, Woodburn produced some of the best crops in the country, selling the farms' foals and yearlings at private annual sales held on the farm instead of at the county court house square with the rest of the area's breeders.

Alexander's decision to specialize had profound effects because it was widely emulated. In a period of about fifty years, Bluegrass horse farmers amassed the world's largest concentration of blooded stallions, and these stallions were key to the massive development of the equine landscape. The breeders who built the concentration of stud farms in the Bluegrass, succeeding Alexander's generation, from the late nineteenth century into the mid-twentieth century, included James R. Keene (Castleton Farm), John E. Madden (Hamburg Place), Arthur B. Hancock (Claiborne), Samuel D. Riddle and Walter M. Jeffords Sr. (Man o' War Farm and Faraway Farm), Colonel E. R. Bradley (Idle Hour), Hal Price Headley (Beaumont Farm), Leslie Combs (Spendthrift), J.B. Haggin and later Joseph E. and George D. Widener (Elmendorf), and William and Warren Wright (Calumet).

"Self-reliant, not waiting for suggestions of others, he took the lead in anything that might occur to his mind, pertaining to the improvement of stock—particularly the blood horse."

Lexington became the recognized "centre of a breeding region which perhaps is not surpassed in the world," wrote Charles Trevathan in his book *The American Thoroughbred* (1905), "and the amount of money which has gone into the state through the Thoroughbred horse alone is beyond computation." During the second half of the twentieth century, Thoroughbred breeders created a new business, based on transparent, industrialized service rather than insider trading, and this business change helped make Lexington "The Horse Capital of the World." The stallions and the stallion farms are the heartbeat of this industrial system. "Whoever controls the semen controls the Thoroughbred industry," said John Gaines, one of the first fully industrialized breeders. Today, the Bluegrass stands over 300 of the most important stallions in the world. Although the number of stallions has dropped from over 500 during the last decade, the Bluegrass still possesses more Thoroughbred stud farms than anywhere else in the world, and the intensity and scale of these industries increase the complexity of their landscapes and their value.



Of LEXINGTON little need be said, as the public are fully aware of his performances as a race horse, which render him probably the most remarkable horse of his time; and my strong conviction of his superior merit, combining as he does, speed and bottom in a most remarkable degree, cannot be better illustrated than by stating the fact that I purchased him whilst in England, at a high price ($15,000), after having seen and inquired into the character and performances of almost every horse of note in that country. It may also be observed that the family to which Lexington belongs stands amongst the first in the Union for their racing qualities.

LEXINGTON,

BAY HORSE—FOALED IN 1850.

GOT BY BOSTON.

1 D. Alice Carneal, by imp. Sarpedon;
2 D. Rowena, by Sumpter;
3 D. Lady Gray, by Robin Grey;
4 D. Maria, by Melzar;
5 D. by imp. Highflyer;
6 D. by imp. Fearnought;
7 D. by Ariel;
8 D. by Jack of Diamonds;
9 D. Old Diamond, (called Duchess). Both Jack of Diamonds and Old Diamond were imported by Gen. Spottswood, and both were by Cullen's Arabian.

Alexander gave an extensive pedigree for the great stallion Lexington in this breeding conditions sheet.

Initiation of Record Keeping

In 1857, R. A. Alexander initiated the practice of keeping pedigree records on all his horses, after the example of the *English General Stud Book*, to protect his investments in blooded horses and to increase their value, tracing the lineage of stallions and mares several generations back. He published the lineages of his horses in a catalog, which advertised the stud services of Lexington and Scythian and their long pedigree lines. His catalog also listed broodmares for sale with long bloodlines up to the ninth dam and stallion. Alexander hired Sanders Deweese Bruce to keep all of Woodburn Farm's records, including an ownership history for each horse as well as purchase and sale prices, which eventually led to the publication of the first volume of the *American Stud Book* in 1868. It was dedicated to R. A. Alexander. Today's Thoroughbred business is based on this innovation and record keeping is second nature.

Frank Anderson

The stallion complex at Three Chimneys Farm near Midway, Kentucky.

Straightening out the pedigrees of horses in Kentucky was not an easy task, however. It was common for pedigree lines to be suspect, even fictitious, in the early going, leading to controversies about the breeding history of many horses. Critics accused Alexander of not knowing enough about American pedigrees to sort out fact from fiction. The argument raged for years. Even though it may have included some padded pedigrees, Alexander's record keeping nonetheless became the essential backbone for improving horses in the United States. Without it, developing the thoroughly bred horse and creating the Standardbred horse and Saddlebred horse would have been impossible. Keeping the correct identity of horses, in part, created Woodburn's complex divisions of interlocking, interdependent pastures and paddocks that separated horses by type, gender, age, and disposition. Horse farms today continue to be fenced up and precisely divided into complex, compartmentalized spaces far beyond what is necessary on other types of farms.

Annual Sales

Alexander held the first of his annual sales at Woodburn in 1860. They were big events that attracted buyers, reporters, and gawkers from far and near. They were also showcases for Kentucky hospitality and Alexander's honest business practices. Edward E. Jones, writing in the *Spirit of the Times,* described the scene in 1860:

> "Early in the morning of Wednesday the people began to collect, and by nine o'clock all there had formed parties of three or four, and were busied in inspecting the animals

which were to be sold. The trains from Lexington and Louisville brought large numbers, and several acres of carriages, buggies, and saddle-horses brought their owners to the festive scene. A platform had been erected for the auctioneer, clerk, and members of the press, and a ring was staked and roped off, into which the animals were led by their keepers, and the business of the day began."

Big parties around sales events did not start or stop with Alexander, but he certainly blazed the way for a tradition that still flourishes amongst the top breeders of the Bluegrass. These annual sales, and the racing parties Alexander hosted in the years before he started the sales, did much to spread his agricultural, architectural and landscape ideas and practices. The sales not only sold horses—they sold an image associated with those horses. If farmers wanted to compete with Woodburn, they needed to duplicate its landscape, its organization, its generosity of spirit. Annual sales took hold on other farms in the Bluegrass and as far as New York, strengthening Woodburn's image as the most admired farm in the United States, fully worthy of imitation.

The horse farm with its manicured vistas has become the internationally recognized symbol of Kentucky and its signature industry.

Boarding Services

Alexander offered to board other owners' mares before and after their breeding, a practice that horse farmers readily adopted and have refined to this day. Breeding mares is problematic at best; Alexander knew success was more likely if he could observe a mare and pick the most favorable time for her cover (breeding). Woodburn would keep outside mares for up to a year if necessary. He offered separate paddocks and sheds for each mare and foal, and promised to graze, feed, and wean according to the owner's wishes.

These services required pastures and buildings that were carefully delineated in the landscape by fences. This compartmentalization represented the beginning of the industrialization of the equine breeding and boarding business. This industrialization is fully evident today on breeding farms, such as Gainesway, where traditional knowledge and modern science combine to make Thoroughbred breeding as efficient as such an endeavor can be.

Clockwork

Before R.A. Alexander began specializing in breeding, he was most interested, like all horse people, in training and racing the fastest horses. Meticulous as ever, Alexander conceived of a revolutionary and scientifically measurable way of determining the speed of horses. He introduced clockwork on graded tracks for training his Standardbreds, blending outstanding performance with pedigree, to establish his horses as the best of the breed. He graded a private, one-mile track on the south side of Old Frankfort Pike as early as 1858 to carry out his daily clocking. "Every day, at the early dawn," according to the *Spirit of the Times*, "the frail man, with his chest-wrappings about him, was on the course, his timing dial in his hands." Alexander's competitors criticized him for his use of time to train race horses, and for asking his trotting horses to race frequently as a part of their training. The use of time as a measuring device for training on private tracks is standard practice on the equine landscape today.

In 1875, the *Kentucky Live Stock Record* succinctly summed up Robert Aitcheson Alexander's approach to the horse business: "Self-reliant, not waiting for suggestions of others, he took the lead in anything that might occur to his mind, pertaining to the improvement of stock—particularly the blood horse." The result, Woodburn Farm, was revolutionary. It was the product of the ultimate formula: considerable outside money and brains, a wealth of inside knowledge about how to produce the fastest horse, the perfect natural environment to raise blooded horses, unmitigated success in racing and breeding over a long period of time, excellent railroad access to both southern and northern markets, and the hospitable environment which pervaded Alexander's property.

After R. A. Alexander's early death at 48 in 1867, his brother A. J. Alexander inherited Woodburn. A. J. was often absent, but under the brilliant manager Lucas Brodhead, Woodburn continued to shine into the early twentieth century. A few other farms from the antebellum era survived into the Victorian age, including Bosque Bonita, Ashland Park, Nantura, and Runnymede (which still has a horse operation). These farms, along with many others established by wealthy outsiders between 1870 and 1900, took up R. A. Alexander's landscape model, thus creating the equine landscape that has become the symbol of an industry and a state. ●

Dennis Domer is the Helen Edwards Abell Chair in Historic Preservation and Director of the Center for Historic Architecture and Preservation at the University of Kentucky. He has published three books and numerous articles on architecture, landscape architecture, and urbanism. This article is excerpted from a book in progress.

BY BERRY CRAJG

World War II aerial gunner Bill Hack survived a ditching in the English Channel and a bombing raid that killed hundreds of his fellow airmen, and still hadn't had enough.

Terror in the Air

It has been 62 years since Nazi fighters and anti-aircraft fire blasted Bill Hack's bomber from the sky in World War II. "When we ditched in the Channel, I was dazed," said Hack, now 84. "But when I smelled my hair burning, it gave me the strength to live."

The date was May 29, 1943. Chester W. "Bill" Hack, a native of Paducah, was an aerial gunner in the Army Air Force. He was 22 years old, flying his third mission against the Germans. His plane was a B-17 Flying Fortress, nicknamed *Barrel House Bessie*. "The crew that had her first named her," said Hack, who after the war worked for 53 years out of Paducah Ironworkers Local 782, retiring as business agent. "I think there was a song about Barrel House Bessie from Basin Street in New Orleans."

Barrel House Bessie was part of the 305th Bomb Group, based in Chelveston, England. The 305th 's target on May 29 was the German submarine base at St. Nazaire, France, on the Atlantic Ocean. Few targets were tougher than the U-boat pens. Each was roofed with tons of steel-reinforced concrete—the Germans boasted the pens were impregnable—and there were so many anti-aircraft guns around St. Nazaire that the American fliers called it "Flak City."

Berry Craig

A B-17 similar to Barrel House Bessie is on display at the Grissom Air Museum in Peru, Indiana. The warplane represents Miss Liberty Belle, an actual B-17 that flew with Hack's 305th Bomb Group.

The 305th "Can Do" Bomb Group was part of the storied Eighth Air Force. The mission of "The Mighty Eighth" was long-range, daylight "precision" bombing of Nazi-occupied Europe, including Germany itself, using B-17 and B-24 heavy bombers. The B-17s and B-24s bombed German weapons factories, power plants, transportation hubs and other key military targets. The goal of such strategic bombing was to destroy the enemy's ability to carry on the war.

By bombing in daytime, it was said, the B-17s and B-24s could hit more targets more accurately. At the same time, day bombing made the bombers and their crews more vulnerable to German anti-aircraft fire and fighter planes. The Army Air Force brass believed, or hoped,

Courtesy Bill Hack

Bill Hack and his crew in front of a B-17. Hack is second from the left at the top

enemy anti-aircraft gunners would have a hard time hitting the bombers, which would attack from high altitude. Also, it was claimed that by flying in tight formations, the machine-gun-bristling B-17s and B-24s could fend off or shoot down most attacking German fighters.

The Americans were partners with the British in what the allies dubbed the "Combined Bomber Offensive." The Royal Air Force also flew heavy, long-range bombers, but the British mainly raided at night. Accuracy, of course, was diminished, but the RAF brass calculated that by dropping tons of explosives on a given area—saturation bombing—enough bombs were bound to hit the target. The British also thought night bombing was safer for air crews. After all, the Germans couldn't shoot down what they couldn't see, or so the theory went. As it turned out, both the Americans and the British suffered heavy losses from anti-aircraft fire (directed by searchlights at night) and from fighters (including specially equipped night fighters).

Military historians still debate whether the benefits of strategic bombing outweighed the high cost in blood and airplanes. Strategic bombing was "tremendously powerful," wrote Charles B. MacDonald in *The Mighty Endeavor: American Armed Forces in the European Theater in World War II*. But, he added, "Despite the tremendous weight of bombs dropped on Germany, only at the end of 1944 had German production of essential military items dropped off sharply, and only in late January and early February of 1945 were indications of eventual collapse present in the German economy." But in *The Wars of America*, Robert Leckie wrote that "the strategic aerial offensive did make a very solid achievement. If it did not destroy the German economy, [strategic bombing] undermined it and prepared it for eventual collapse."

In *Flying Fortress*, Edward Jablonski wrote that losses in the Eighth and Fifteenth air forces (the Fifteenth operated in the Mediterranean Theater) totaled almost 68,000, killed, wounded, and missing. Nearly 31,500 more airmen were taken prisoner. "The loss rate of bomber crews, if analyzed statistically, was second only to the infantry." Nonetheless, Jablonski quoted four high-ranking foes—Hermann Goering, head of the Nazi Luftwaffe (or air force), two of his top commanders, and the arms manufacturer Alfred Krupp—as agreeing that strategic bombing was a major reason Germany lost the war. "Allied air power was the chief factor in Germany's defeat," said Luftwaffe Marshal Hugo Sperrle.

When Bill Hack reported to the 305th Group, American heavy bomber crews had to complete 25 missions before they could go home. A flier's chance of survival was said to be one in three. "Most of us just resigned ourselves to knowing we were going to get shot down," Hack said. "The only question was would you be killed, or would you be able to bail out, then be captured." On the St. Nazaire raid, Hack was *Bessie*'s right waist gunner, manning a 50-caliber machine gun about halfway along the B-17's pudgy round fuselage. "A B-17 had ten men," Hack said. The crew included the pilot, co-pilot, navigator/bombardier, radio operator, flight engineer, top turret gunner, two waist gunners, a ball turret gunner and a tail gunner.

For the St. Nazaire mission, he replaced one of *Bessie*'s gunners who had been killed in action a few days before. Hack and his fellow gunners had plenty to shoot at en route to St. Nazaire. Fast Messerschmitt 109 and Focke Wulf 190 fighters bushwhacked the lumbering bomb-laden Fortresses soon after the B-17s left England. "We were under attack all the way from the English Channel into St. Nazaire," Hack said. *Bessie* took a beating, but kept flying. "The plane was shot up pretty badly before we even got to the target. My oxygen system, which was a line that ran just above my head, had been shot out. A 20-millimeter shell from a Focke Wulf 190 broke that line in two."

"When I smelled my hair burning, it gave me the strength to live."

He reached down for his metal emergency bottle, which held a 30-minute supply of oxygen. "As I worked to plug my oxygen mask into it, a shell hit the bottle, and it blew up in my hands. By this time, I was so weak from lack of oxygen that I was down on my knees. "I crawled to the left waist gunner, got him by the leg and pointed to my mask. He immediately grabbed his emergency bottle and plugged me into it. I got to feeling better." Hack's comfort was fleeting. "Flak was real heavy over St. Nazaire. The sky looked like a big black cloud from all that flak. I got wounded in the shoulder. Everybody on the plane was hit."

Bessie took her hardest shots shortly after she dropped her bombs. A flak barrage crippled the plane and destroyed two B-17s flying with her. "We were in three-plane formations," Hack said. "We were stacked three here, three there. The two with us blew up. Each one of them had some good friends of mine in it. I learned later that four of them bailed out, but two of them died that night in a German hospital. We lost a total of 13 planes on the raid." Flak riddled *Bessie*'s number two engine, setting it ablaze. The B-17 nosed into what seemed to be a death dive.

"'This is it' crossed my mind," Hack said, "but I'd been feeling like 'this is it' for quite a while. We were in a very steep dive—from 28,000 feet to about 500 feet—before the pilot and co-pilot were able to pull us out." They were lucky the flak found *Bessie* after her bombs were away. "If that bomb load had gone off, we would have been vaporized. I have seen that happen, too, with other aircraft." Meanwhile, everything that could be spared was tossed overboard to lighten *Bessie* and keep the wounded bomber flying. Hack checked on Sgt. Ralph Erwin, the tail gunner. "There were big holes all over the tail section. One was two feet in diameter. Ralph was hurt pretty bad. It looked like he was in shock."

Hack dragged Erwin to the radio room, then took over the twin 50-caliber machine guns, the stinger in *Bessie*'s tail. Limping on three engines, the Fortress was not out of harm's way.

"When a plane is knocked out of formation like we were, the German fighters would gang on it like a pack of wolves. We had made it back to the French coast on the channel, about 100 miles from England, when two Messerschmitts jumped us." Hack squeezed off several bursts of rapid-fire at the attackers. "I guess they thought they had a sitting duck," he said. Suddenly, the Nazi planes turned tail and veered off toward France.

"The pilot told us to take what we called ditch positions. We knew it was going to be rough. You could see whitecaps. We all got in the radio room and braced ourselves against the bulkhead walls." *Bessie* slammed into the choppy sea. The impact hurled Hack and another crewman from the radio compartment through an aluminum door into the empty bomb bay.

Berry Craig

Bill Hack with his decorations from World War II.

Hack felt like cheering when he saw a flight of British Spitfires chasing the enemy away. "Those Spitfires were the most beautiful airplanes I ever saw."

Bessie wasn't close to home free. "Our pilot, Lt. James Stevenson, had thought he could get us back to England, but *Barrel House Bessie* had given us all she had." The crippled warbird was doomed. "We were within 50 miles of the coast of England when we ditched," Hack said.

"It knocked the door completely off its hinges," Hack said. "I thought my back was broken. The bomb bay was filling up with water and there was burning gas from the engines on top of it. The entire bomb bay was engulfed in flames. By the time I got back into the radio room, the rest of the crew had gotten out." His face blistered and his hair scorched, the dazed, bruised and bleed-

ing Hack escaped by wiggling through a window in the top of the plane above the radio operator's seat. He slid down the fuselage onto the right wing. "Fire had completely encircled the plane and the gasoline was spreading all over the water."

Bessie carried a pair of inflatable rubber dinghies. One was banged up, the other burned up. Hack plunged into the frigid salt water and swam through the blazing gasoline to reach the damaged dinghy. "It had been shot full of holes and couldn't be fully inflated," he said. Everybody but Ralph Erwin got out of *Barrel House Bessie*, which soon slipped beneath the waves. "We couldn't get into the raft, but nine of us held on to it for an hour and a half," Hack said. As the Spitfires circled overhead protecting their American allies from more German fighters, a British seaplane arrived to rescue the downed fliers. But the channel was too rough for a landing, and the flying boat turned back to England. "That was really hard to take to see him disappearing."

"'This is it' crossed my mind, but I'd been feeling like 'this is it' for quite a while."

Having survived enemy fighters, flak, a terrifying dive and a crash landing, Bessie's crew faced yet another peril—hypothermia. "They told me," Hack said, "that even in the month of May, the English Channel is usually around 48 degrees. We had just about succumbed when a British navy torpedo boat finally got to us." The nine Americans were hauled safely aboard the little boat, which bobbed like a cork in the heavy sea. "I was already in such a condition that they had to tie a rope around me and pull me up on the deck. I couldn't climb that rope ladder on the boat.

"I was sprawled out on the deck and a British sailor—I never will forget him, God bless him—stuck this bottle of rum in my mouth. It was either drink or drown. I didn't have the strength to push it away. He just kept pouring that rum in me. I don't know if it was from shock, hypothermia or that rum, but I passed out and when I came to I was in an ambulance on the way to a British naval hospital." After two weeks in British and U.S. military hospitals, Hack was back with his bomber group. He rejoined his old crew, what was left of it. "Four of the 10 had been killed," Hack said. Still, he was glad to be reunited with his buddies. They mainly flew in a B-17 with "Me and My Gal" painted on her nose. "Our radioman named the plane for a song Judy Garland sang that went, 'The bells are ringing for me and my gal,'" Hack said, grinning. "He was kind of stuck on Judy Garland."

Hack logged 22 more missions, including the Eighth Air Force's famous first raid on heavily-defended Schweinfurt and Regensburg, Germany, on August 17, 1943. Schweinfurt was home to Nazi ball bearing factories. The enemy built Messerschmitt fighters at Regensburg. The 305th's target was Schweinfurt. "The Regensburg-Schweinfurt mission was historic, too, because it marked the deepest [Eighth Air Force] penetration into Germany to that time," wrote Jablonski in *Flying Fortress*. And, it was of unprecedented size—376 Flying Fortresses.

"They told us before we left that not many of us would be coming back from this one," Hack said. "But they said if we destroyed those ball bearing plants, it would really hurt the Germans and save untold lives of our soldiers on the ground." The Nazi fighters and flak made the blue sky "look like a junkyard—a plane's wing blown off over here, an engine over there, a tail section someplace else, and six guys going past with their parachutes on fire. It was horrible."

Miraculously, his plane was only slightly damaged. Many more crews were not so fortunate. According to Army Air Force records, 60 bombers were shot down—a loss of 600 men killed or captured.

After mission 25, Hack was shipped stateside. He was teaching aerial gunnery in sunny Florida when, as he put it, "I lost my mind. I volunteered to go back and fly combat missions again." He flew four more missions against the Germans before the war in Europe ended in May, 1945. He said his happiest mission was over Holland that spring when a group of B-17s flew low and dropped food to starving Dutch civilians.

Courtesy Bill Hack

A young Bill Hack in his dress uniform.

Staff Sgt. Hack earned a Distinguished Flying Cross, a Purple Heart, four Air Medals and two Presidential Unit Citations. His medals hang in a frame with his shiny silver air crewman's wings on a bedroom wall in his house on Paducah's Bloom Avenue. A photo of him from World War II hangs next to the medals. He is still grateful to the British sailors who saved him from the sea 62 years ago. He is also sorrowful.

"As we were clinging to that rubber dinghy, we could see Ralph Erwin's body as the waves caught it. Ralph was 31, from Dallas, Oregon. He was a quiet guy who didn't much mix with the rest of us, but we all liked him. We asked the British captain to go get him, but he said we had to leave him because of the danger of enemy air attacks. So we left Ralph, and he floated away into oblivion." ●

Berry Craig is a professor of history at West Kentucky Community and Technical College in Paducah, and a member of the Kentucky Humanities Council Speakers Bureau.

Robert Penn Warren, known to his friends as Red, was born a century ago in the Todd County town of Guthrie. He grew up to be Kentucky's greatest writer.

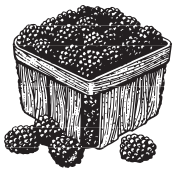
Happy Birthday, Red!

Few would disagree with Wade Hall's assertion that Robert Penn Warren (1905-1989) was "the greatest writer Kentucky has produced." And the emphasis is on writer, not merely novelist, or poet, or critic, for he was all of those. Warren won three Pulitzer Prizes—one for the novel *All the King's Men*, and two for poetry. He is still the only writer to win in both categories. In 1986 he was appointed America's first Poet Laureate. The testimony of scholars and critics is invaluable,

Courtesy Kentucky Historical Society

Robert Penn Warren, 1905-1989

but on his 100th birthday, we will let Red Warren speak for himself. Whether you are reading "Blackberry Winter" for the first time, or rereading it, this tale first published in 1947 shows what makes a great short story. In "Blackberry Winter: A Recollection," Warren recalled that the story was written in the aftermath of World War II, and that the story that "had started out for me as, perhaps, an act of escape, of fleeing back into the simplicities of childhood, had turned, as it always must if we accept the logic of our lives, into an attempt to bring something meaningfully out of that simple past into the complication of the present."



Blackberry Winter

Robert Penn Warren

To Joseph Warren and Dagmar Beach

It was getting into June and past eight o'clock in the morning, but there was a fire—even if it wasn't a big fire, just a fire of chunks—on the hearth of the big stone fireplace in the living room. I was standing on the hearth, almost into the chimney, hunched over the fire, working my bare toes slowly on the warm stone. I relished the heat which made the skin of my bare legs warp and creep and tingle, even as I called to my mother, who was somewhere back in the dining room or kitchen, and said: "But it's June, I don't have to put them on!"

"You put them on if you are going out," she called.

I tried to assess the degree of authority and conviction in the tone, but at that distance it was hard to decide. I tried to analyze the tone, and then I thought what a fool I had been to start out the back door and let her see that I was barefoot. If I had gone out the front door or the side door, she would never have known, not till dinner time anyway, and by then the day would have been half gone and I would have been all over the farm to see what the storm had done and down to the creek to see the flood. But it had never crossed my mind that they would try to stop you from going barefoot in June, no matter if there had been a gully-washer and a cold spell.

Nobody had ever tried to stop me in June as long as I could remember, and when you are nine years old, what you remember seems forever; for you remem-

Blackberry Winter

Robert Penn Warren

ber everything and everything is important and stands big and full and fills up Time and is so solid that you can walk around and around it like a tree and look at it. You are aware that time passes, that there is a movement in time, but that is not what Time is. Time is not a movement, a flowing, a wind then, but is, rather, a kind of climate in which things are, and when a thing happens it begins to live and keeps on living and stands solid in Time like the tree that you can walk around. And if there is a movement, the movement is not Time itself, any more than a breeze is climate, and all the breeze does is to shake a little the leaves on the tree which is alive and solid. When you are nine, you know that there are things that you don't know, but you know that when you know something you know it. You know how a thing has been and you know that you can go barefoot in June. You do not understand that voice from back in the kitchen which says that you cannot go barefoot outdoors and run to see what has happened and rub your feet over the wet shivery grass and make the perfect mark of your foot in the smooth, creamy, red mud and then muse upon it as though you had suddenly come upon that single mark on the glistening auroral beach of the world. You have never seen a beach, but you have read the book and how the footprint was there.

The voice had said what it had said, and I looked savagely at the black stockings and the strong, scuffed brown shoes which I had brought from my closet as far as the hearth rug. I called once more, "But it's June," and waited.

"It's June," the voice replied from far away, "but it's blackberry winter."

I had lifted my head to reply to that, to make one more test of what was in that tone, when I happened to see the man.

The fireplace in the living room was at the end; for the stone chimney was built, as in so many of the farmhouses in Tennessee, at the end of a gable, and there was a window on each side of the chimney. Out of the window on the north side of the fireplace I could see the man. When I saw the man I did not call out what I had intended, but, engrossed by the strangeness of the sight, watched him, still far off, come along the path by the edge of the woods.

I shut my eyes for a couple of seconds, thinking that when I opened them he would not be there at all.

What was strange was that there should be a man there at all. That path went along the yard fence, between the fence and the woods which came right down to the yard, and then on back past the chicken runs and on by the woods until it was lost to sight where the woods bulged out and cut off the back field. There the path disappeared into the woods. It led on back, I knew, through the woods and to the swamp, skirted the swamp where the big trees gave way to sycamores and water oaks and willows and tangled cane, and then led on to the river. Nobody ever went back there except people who wanted to gig frogs in the swamp or to fish in the river or to hunt in the woods, and those people, if they didn't have a standing permission from my father, always stopped to ask permission to cross the farm. But the man whom I now saw wasn't, I could tell even at that distance, a sportsman. And what would a sportsman have been doing down there after a storm? Besides, he was coming from the river, and nobody had gone down there that morning. I knew that for a fact, because if anybody had passed, certainly if a stranger had passed, the dogs would have made a racket and would have been out on him. But this man was coming up from the river and had come up through the woods. I suddenly had a vision of him moving up the grassy path in the woods, in the green twilight under the big trees, not making any sound on the path, while now and then, like drops off the eaves, a big drop of water would fall from a leaf or bough and strike a stiff oak leaf lower down with a small, hollow sound like a drop of water hitting tin. That sound, in the silence of the woods, would be very significant.

When you are a boy and stand in the stillness of woods, which can be so still that your heart almost stops beating and makes you want to stand there in the green twilight until you feel your very feet sinking into and clutching the earth like roots and your body breathing slow through its pores like the leaves—when you stand there and wait for the next drop to drop with its small, flat sound to a lower leaf, that sound seems to measure out something, to put an end to something, to begin something, and you cannot wait for it to happen and are afraid it will not happen, and then when it has happened, you are waiting again, almost afraid.

But the man whom I saw coming through the woods in my mind's eye did not pause and wait, growing into the ground and breathing with the enormous, soundless breathing of the leaves. Instead, I saw him moving in the green twilight inside my head as he was moving at that very moment along the path by the edge of the woods, coming toward the house. He was moving steadily, but not fast, with his shoulders hunched a little and his head thrust forward, like a man who has come a long way and has a long way to go. I shut my eyes for a couple of seconds, thinking that when I opened them he would not be there at all. There was no place for him to have come from, and there was no reason for him to come where he was coming, toward our house. But I opened my eyes, and there he was, and he was coming steadily along the side

Blackberry Winter

Robert Penn Warren

of the woods. He was not yet even with the back chicken yard.

"Mama," I called.

"You put them on," the voice said.

"There's a man coming," I called, "out back."

She did not reply to that, and I guessed that she had gone to the kitchen window to look. She would be looking at the man and wondering who he was and what he wanted, the way you always do in the country, and if I went back there now, she would not notice right off whether or not I was barefoot. So I went back to the kitchen.

She was standing by the window. "I don't recognize him," she said, not looking around at me.

"Where could he be coming from?" I asked.

"I don't know," she said.

"What would he be doing down at the river? At night? In the storm?"

She studied the figure out the window, then said, "Oh, I reckon maybe he cut across from the Dunbar place."

That was, I realized, a perfectly rational explanation. He had not been down at the river in the storm, at night. He had come over this morning. You could cut across from the Dunbar place if you didn't mind breaking through a lot of elder and sassafras and blackberry bushes which had about taken over the old cross path, which nobody ever used any more. That satisfied me for a moment, but only for a moment. "Mama," I asked, "what would he be doing over at the Dunbar place last night?"

Then she looked at me, and I knew I had made a mistake, for she was looking at my bare feet. "You haven't got your shoes on," she said.

But I was saved by the dogs. That instant there was a bark which I recognized as Sam, the collie, and then a heavier, churning kind of bark which was Bully, and I saw a streak of white as Bully tore round the corner of the back porch and headed out for the man. Bully was a big bone-white bulldog, the kind of dog that they used to call a farm bulldog but that you don't see any more, heavy-chested and heavy-headed, but with pretty long legs. He could take a fence as light as a hound. He had just cleared the white paling fence toward the woods when my mother ran out to the back porch and began calling, "Here you, Bully! Here you!"

Bully stopped in the path, waiting for the man, but he gave a few more of those deep, gargling, savage barks that reminded you of something down a stone-lined well. The red-clay mud, I saw, was splashed up over his white chest and looked exciting, like blood.

The man, however, had not stopped walking even when Bully took the fence and started at him. He had kept right on coming. All he had done was to switch a little paper parcel which he carried from the right hand to the left, and then reach into his pants pocket to get something. Then I saw the glitter and knew that he had a knife in his hand, probably the kind of mean knife just made for devilment and nothing else, with a blade as long as the blade of a frog-sticker, which will snap out ready when you press a button in the handle. That knife must have had a button in the handle, or else how could he have had the blade out glittering so quick and with just one hand?

Then I saw the glitter and knew that he had a knife in his hand, probably the kind of mean knife just made for devilment and nothing else.

Pulling his knife against the dogs was a funny thing to do, for Bully was a big, powerful brute and fast, and Sam was all right. If those dogs had meant business, they might have knocked him down and ripped him before he got a stroke in. He ought to have picked up a heavy stick, something to take a swipe at them with and something which they could see and respect when they came at him. But he apparently did not know much about dogs. He just held the knife blade close against the right leg, low down, and kept on moving down the path.

Then my mother had called, and Bully had stopped. So the man let the blade of the knife snap back into the handle, and dropped it into his pocket, and kept on coming. Many women would have been afraid with the strange man who they knew had that knife in his pocket. That is, if they were alone in the house with nobody but a nine-year-old boy. And my mother was alone, for my father had gone off, and Dellie, the cook, was down at her cabin because she wasn't feeling well. But my mother wasn't afraid. She wasn't a big woman, but she was clear and brisk about everything she did and looked everybody and everything right in the eye from her own blue eyes in her tanned face. She had been the first woman in the county to ride a horse astride (that was back when she was a girl and long before I was born), and I have seen her snatch up a pump gun and go out and knock a chicken hawk out of the air like a busted skeet when he came over her chicken yard. She was a steady and self-reliant woman, and when I think of her now after all the years she has been dead, I think of her brown hands, not big, but somewhat square for a woman's hands, with square-cut nails. They looked, as a matter of fact, more like a young boy's hands than a grown woman's. But back then it never crossed my mind that she would ever be dead.

She stood on the back porch and watched the man enter the back gate, where the dogs (Bully had leaped back into the yard) were dancing and muttering and giving sidelong glances back to my mother to see if she meant what she had said. The man walked right by the

Blackberry Winter

Robert Penn Warren

dogs, almost brushing them, and didn't pay them any attention. I could see now that he wore old khaki pants, and a dark wool coat with stripes in it, and a gray felt hat. He had on a gray shirt with blue stripes in it, and no tie. But I could see a tie, blue and reddish, sticking in his side coat-pocket. Everything was wrong about what he wore. He ought to have been wearing blue jeans or overalls, and a straw hat or an old black felt hat, and the coat, granting that he might have been wearing a wool coat and not a jumper, ought not to have had those stripes. Those clothes, despite the fact that they were old enough and dirty enough for any tramp, didn't belong there in our back yard, coming down the path, in Middle Tennessee, miles away from any big town, and even a mile off the pike.

When he got almost to the steps, without having said anything, my mother, very matter-of-factly, said, "Good morning."

"Good morning," he said, and stopped and looked her over. He did not take off his hat, and under the brim you could see the perfectly unmemorable face, which wasn't old and wasn't young, or thick or thin. It was grayish and covered with about three days of stubble. The eyes were a kind of nondescript, muddy hazel, or something like that, rather bloodshot. His teeth, when he opened his mouth, showed yellow and uneven. A couple of them had been knocked out. You knew that they had been knocked out, because there was a scar, not very old, there on the lower lip just beneath the gap.

"Are you hunting work?" my mother asked him.

"Yes," he said—not "yes, mam"—and still did not take off his hat.

"I don't know about my husband, for he isn't here," she said, and didn't mind a bit telling the tramp, or whoever he was, with the mean knife in his pocket, that no man was around, "but I can give you a few things to do. The storm has drowned a lot of my chicks. Three coops of them. You can gather them up and bury them. Bury them deep so the dogs won't get at them. In the woods. And fix the coops the wind blew over. And down yonder beyond that pen by the edge of the woods are some drowned poults. They got out and I couldn't get them in. Even after it started to rain hard. Poults haven't got any sense."

He had the movements of a man who has just dressed up to go to church or a party—the way he settled his coat and smoothed it and scanned himself in the mirror.

"What are them things—poults?" he demanded, and spat on the brick walk. He rubbed his foot over the spot, and I saw that he wore a black pointed-toe low shoe, all cracked and broken. It was a crazy kind of shoe to be wearing in the country.

"Oh, they're young turkeys," my mother was saying. "And they haven't got any sense. Oughtn't to try to raise them around here with so many chickens, anyway. They don't thrive near chickens, even in separate pens. And I won't give up my chickens." Then she stopped herself and resumed briskly on the note of business. "When you finish that, you can fix my flower beds. A lot of trash and mud and gravel has washed down. Maybe you can save some of my flowers if you are careful."

"Flowers," the man said, in a low, impersonal voice which seemed to have a wealth of meaning, but a meaning which I could not fathom. As I think back on it, it probably was not pure contempt. Rather, it was a kind of impersonal and distant marveling that he should be on the verge of grubbing in a flower bed. He said the word, and then looked off across the yard.

"Yes, flowers," my mother replied with some asperity, as though she would have nothing said or implied against flowers. "And they were very fine this year." Then she stopped and looked at the man. "Are you hungry?" she demanded.

"Yeah," he said.

"I'll fix you something," she said, "before you get started." She turned to me. "Show him where he can wash up," she commanded, and went into the house.

I took the man to the end of the porch where a pump was and where a couple of wash pans sat on a low shelf for people to use before they went into the house. I stood there while he laid down his little parcel wrapped in newspaper and took off his hat and looked around for a nail to hang it on. He poured the water and plunged his hands into it. They were big hands, and strong-looking, but they did not have the creases and the earth-color of the hands of men who work outdoors. But they were dirty, with black dirt ground into the skin and under the nails. After he had washed his hands, he poured another basin of water and washed his face. He dried his face, and with the towel still dangling in his grasp, stepped over to the mirror on the house wall. He rubbed one hand over the stubble on his face. Then he carefully inspected his face, turning first one side and then the other, and stepped back and settled his striped coat down on his shoulders. He had the movements of a man who has just dressed up to go to church or a party—the way he settled his coat and smoothed it and scanned himself in the mirror.

Then he caught my glance on him. He glared at me for an instant out of the bloodshot eyes, then demanded in a low, harsh voice, "What you looking at?"

"Nothing," I managed to say, and stepped back a step from him.

Blackberry Winter

Robert Penn Warren

He flung the towel down, crumpled, on the shelf, and went toward the kitchen door and entered without knocking.

My mother said something to him which I could not catch. I started to go in again, then thought about my bare feet, and decided to go back of the chicken yard, where the man would have to come to pick up the dead chicks. I hung around behind the chicken house until he came out.

He moved across the chicken yard with a fastidious, not quite finicking motion, looking down at the curdled mud flecked with bits of chicken-droppings. The mud curled up over the soles of his black shoes. I stood back from him some six feet and watched him pick up the first of the drowned chicks. He held it up by one foot and inspected it.

There is nothing deader-looking than a drowned chick. The feet curl in that feeble, empty way which back when I was a boy, even if I was a country boy who did not mind hog-killing or frog-gigging, made me feel hollow in the stomach. Instead of looking plump and fluffy, the body is stringy and limp with the fluff plastered to it, and the neck is long and loose like a little string of rag. And the eyes have that bluish membrane over them which makes you think of a very old man who is sick about to die.

The man stood there and inspected the chick. Then he looked all around as though he didn't know what to do with it.

"There's a great big old basket in the shed," I said, and pointed to the shed attached to the chicken house.

He inspected me as though he had just discovered my presence, and moved toward the shed.

"There's a spade there, too," I added.

He got the basket and began to pick up the other chicks, picking each one up slowly by a foot and then flinging it into the basket with a nasty, snapping motion. Now and then he would look at me out of the bloodshot eyes. Every time he seemed on the verge of saying something, but he did not. Perhaps he was building up to say something to me, but I did not wait that long. His way of looking at me made me so uncomfortable that I left the chicken yard.

Besides, I had just remembered that the creek was in flood, over the bridge, and that people were down there watching it. So I cut across the farm toward the creek. When I got to the big tobacco field I saw that it had not suffered much. The land lay right and not many tobacco plants had washed out of the ground. But I knew that a lot of tobacco round the country had been washed right out. My father had said so at breakfast.

My father was down at the bridge. When I came out of the gap in the osage hedge into the road, I saw him sitting on his mare over the heads of the other men who were standing around, admiring the flood. The creek was big here, even in low water; for only a couple of miles away it ran into the river, and when a real flood came, the red water got over the pike where it dipped down to the bridge, which was an iron bridge, and high over the floor and even the side railings of the bridge. Only the upper iron work would show, with the water boiling and frothing red and white around it. That creek rose so fast and so heavy because a few miles back it came down out of the hills, where the gorges filled up with water in no time when a rain came. The creek ran in a deep bed with limestone bluffs along both sides until it got within three quarters of a mile of the bridge, and when it came out from between those bluffs in flood it was boiling and hissing and steaming like water from a fire hose.

Whenever there was a flood, people from half the county would come down to see the sight. After a gully-washer there would not be any work to do anyway. If it didn't ruin your crop, you couldn't plow and you felt like taking a holiday to celebrate. If it did ruin your crop, there wasn't anything to do except to try to take your mind off the mortgage, if you were rich enough to have a mortgage, and if you couldn't afford a mortgage, you needed something to take your mind off how hungry you would be by Christmas. So people would come down to the bridge and look at the flood. It made something different from the run of days.

There would not be much talking after the first few minutes of trying to guess how high the water was this time. The men and kids just stood around, or sat their horses or mules, as the case might be, or stood up in the wagon beds. They looked at the strangeness of the flood for an hour or two, and then somebody would say that he had better be getting on home to dinner and would start walking down the gray, puddled limestone pike, or would touch heel to his mount and start off. Everybody always knew what it would be like when he got down to the bridge, but people always came. It was like church or a funeral. They always came, that is, if it was summer and the flood unexpected. Nobody ever came down in winter to see high water.

I was sitting there as quiet as I could, feeling the faint stir of my father's chest against my shoulders as it rose and fell with his breath, when I saw the cow.

When I came out of the gap in the bodock hedge, I saw the crowd, perhaps fifteen or twenty men and a lot of kids, and saw my father sitting his mare, Nellie Gray. He was a tall, limber man and carried himself well. I was always proud to see him sit a horse, he was so quiet and

Blackberry Winter

Robert Penn Warren

straight, and when I stepped through the gap of the hedge that morning, the first thing that happened was, I remember, the warm feeling I always had when I saw him up on a horse, just sitting. I did not go toward him, but skirted the crowd on the far side, to get a look at the creek. For one thing, I was not sure what he would say about the fact that I was barefoot. But the first thing I knew, I heard his voice calling, "Seth!"

I went toward him, moving apologetically past the men, who bent their large, red or thin, sallow faces above me. I knew some of the men, and knew their names, but because those I knew were there in a crowd, mixed with the strange faces, they seemed foreign to me, and not friendly. I did not look up at my father until I was almost within touching distance of his heel. Then I looked up and tried to read his face, to see if he was angry about my being barefoot. Before I could decide anything from that impassive, high-boned face, he had leaned over and reached a hand to me. "Grab on," he commanded.

I grabbed on and gave a little jump, and he said, "Up-see-daisy!" and whisked me, light as a feather, up to the pommel of his McClellan saddle.

"You can see better up here," he said, slid back on the cantle a little to make me more comfortable, and then, looking over my head at the swollen, tumbling water, seemed to forget all about me. But his right hand was laid on my side, just above my thigh, to steady me.

I was sitting there as quiet as I could, feeling the faint stir of my father's chest against my shoulders as it rose and fell with his breath, when I saw the cow. At first, looking up the creek, I thought it was just another big piece of driftwood steaming down the creek in the ruck of water, but all at once a pretty good-size boy who had climbed part way up a telephone pole by the pike so that he could see better yelled out, "Golly-damn, look at that-air cow!"

Everybody looked. It was a cow all right, but it might just as well have been driftwood; for it was dead as a chunk, rolling and roiling down the creek, appearing and disappearing, feet up or head up, it didn't matter which.

The cow started up the talk again. Somebody wondered whether it would hit one of the clear places under the top girder of the bridge and get through or whether it would get tangled in the drift and trash that had piled against the upright girders and braces. Somebody remembered how about ten years before, so much driftwood had piled up on the bridge that it was knocked off its foundations. Then the cow hit. It hit the edge of the drift against one of the girders, and hung there. For a few seconds it seemed as though it might tear loose, but then we saw that it was really caught. It bobbed and heaved on its side there in a slow, grinding, uneasy fashion. It had a yoke around its neck, the kind made out of a forked limb to keep a jumper behind fence.

"She shore jumped one fence," one of the men said.

And another: "Well, she done jumped her last one, fer a fack."

Then they began to wonder about whose cow it might be. They decided it must belong to Milt Alley. They said that he had a cow that was a jumper, and kept her in a fenced-in piece of ground up the creek. I had never seen Milt Alley, but I knew who he was. He was a squatter and lived up the hills a way, on a shirt-tail patch of set-on-edge land, in a cabin. He was pore white trash. He had lots of children. I had seen the children at school, when they came. They were thin-faced, with straight, sticky-looking, dough-colored hair, and they smelled something like old sour buttermilk, not because they drank so much buttermilk but because that is the sort of smell which children out of those cabins tend to have. The big Alley boy drew dirty pictures and showed them to the little boys at school.

That was Milt Alley's cow. It looked like the kind of cow he would have, a scrawny, old, sway-backed cow, with a yoke around her neck. I wondered if Milt Alley had another cow.

"Poppa," I said, "do you think Milt Alley has got another cow?"

"You say 'Mr. Alley,'" my father said quietly.

"Do you think he has?"

"No telling," my father said.

Then a big gangly boy, about fifteen, who was sitting on a scraggly little old mule with a piece of croker sack thrown across the sawtooth spine, and who had been staring at the cow, suddenly said to nobody in particular, "Reckin anybody ever et drownt cow?"

He was the kind of boy who might just as well as not have been the son of Milt Alley, with his faded and patched overalls ragged at the bottom of the pants and the mud-stiff brogans hanging off his skinny, bare ankles at the level of the mule's belly. He had said what he did, and then looked embarrassed and sullen when all the eyes swung at him. He hadn't meant to say it, I am pretty sure now. He would have been too proud to say it, just as Milt Alley would have been too proud. He had just been thinking out loud, and the words had popped out.

There was an old man standing there on the pike, an old man with a white beard. "Son," he said to the embarrassed and sullen boy on the mule, "you live long

"Son," he said to the embarrassed and sullen boy on the mule, "you live long enough and you'll find a man will eat anything when the time comes."

enough and you'll find a man will eat anything when the time comes."

"Time gonna come fer some folks this year," another man said.

"Son," the old man said, "in my time I et things a man don't like to think on. I was a sojer and I rode with Gin'l Forrest, and them things we et when the time come. I tell you. I et meat what got up and run when you taken out yore knife to cut a slice to put on the fire. You had to knock it down with a carbeen butt, it was so active. That-air meat would jump like a bullfrog, it was so full of skippers."

But nobody was listening to the old man. The boy on the mule turned his sullen sharp face from him, dug a heel into the side of the mule, and went off up the pike with a motion which made you think that any second you would hear mule bones clashing inside that lank and scrofulous hide.

"Cy Dundee's boy," a man said, and nodded toward the figure going up the pike on the mule.

"Reckin Cy Dundee's young-uns seen times they'd settle fer drownt cow," another man said.

The old man with the beard peered at them both from his weak, slow eyes, first at one and then at the other. "Live long enough," he said, "and a man will settle fer what he kin git."

Then there was silence again, with the people looking at the red, foam-flecked water.

My father lifted the bridle rein in his left hand, and the mare turned and walked around the group and up the pike. We rode on up to our big gate, where my father dismounted to open it and let me myself ride Nellie Gray through. When he got to the lane that led off from the drive about two hundred yards from our house, my father said, "Grab on." I grabbed on, and he let me down to the ground. "I'm going to ride down and look at my corn," he said. "You go on." He took the lane, and I stood there on the drive and watched him ride off. He was wearing cowhide boots and an old hunting coat, and I thought that that made him look very military, like a picture. That and the way he rode.

I did not go to the house. Instead, I went by the vegetable garden and crossed behind the stables, and headed down for Dellie's cabin. I wanted to go down and play with Jebb, who was Dellie's little boy about two years older than I was. Besides, I was cold. I shivered as I walked, and I had gooseflesh. The mud which crawled up between my toes with every step I took was like ice. Dellie would have a fire, but she wouldn't make me put on shoes and stockings.

"Dellie," I said after a minute, "there's a tramp up at the house. He's got a knife." She was not listening. She closed her eyes.

Dellie's cabin was of logs, with one side, because it was on a slope, set on limestone chunks, with a little porch attached to it, and had a little white-washed fence around it and a gate with plow-points on a wire to clink when somebody came in, and had two big white oaks in the yard and some flowers and a nice privy in the back with some honeysuckle growing over it. Dellie and Old Jebb, who was Jebb's father and who lived with Dellie and had lived with her for twenty-five years even if they never had got married, were careful to keep everything nice around their cabin. They had the name all over the community for being clean and clever Negroes. Dellie and Jebb were what they used to call "white-folks' niggers." There was a big difference between their cabin and the other two cabins farther down where the other tenants lived. My father kept the other cabins weatherproof, but he couldn't undertake to go down and pick up after the litter they strewed. They didn't take the trouble to have a vegetable patch like Dellie and Jebb or to make preserves from wild plum, and jelly from crab apple the way Dellie did. They were shiftless, and my father was always threatening to get shed of them. But he never did. When they finally left, they just up and left on their own, for no reason, to go and be shiftless somewhere else. Then some more came. But meanwhile they lived down there, Matt Rawson and his family, and Sid Turner and his, and I played with their children all over the farm when they weren't working. But when I wasn't around they were mean sometimes to Little Jebb. That was because the other tenants down there were jealous of Dellie and Jebb.

I was so cold that I ran the last fifty yards to Dellie's gate. As soon as I had entered the yard, I saw that the storm had been hard on Dellie's flowers. The yard was, as I have said, on a slight slope, and the water running across had gutted the flower beds and washed out all the good black woods-earth which Dellie had brought in. What little grass there was in the yard was plastered sparsely down on the ground, the way the drainage water had left it. It reminded me of the way the fluff was plastered down on the skin of the drowned chicks that the strange man had been picking up, up in my mother's chicken yard.

I took a few steps up the path to the cabin, and then I saw that the drainage water had washed a lot of trash and filth out from under Dellie's house. Up toward the porch, the ground was not clean any more. Old pieces of rag, two or three rusted cans, pieces of rotten rope, some hunks of old dog dung, broken glass, old paper, and all sorts of things like that had washed out from under Dellie's house to foul her clean yard. It looked just as bad as the yards of the other cabins, or worse. It was worse, as a matter of fact, because

Blackberry Winter

Robert Penn Warren

it was a surprise. I had never thought of all that filth being under Dellie's house. It was not anything against Dellie that the stuff had been under the cabin. Trash will get under any house. But I did not think of that when I saw the foulness which had washed out on the ground which Dellie sometimes used to sweep with a twig broom to make nice and clean.

"I'm cold. I'm cold because it's blackberry winter," I said. "Maybe 'tis and maybe 'tain't," he said.

I picked my way past the filth, being careful not to get my bare feet on it, and mounted to Dellie's door. When I knocked, I heard her voice telling me to come in.

It was dark inside the cabin, after the daylight, but I could make out Dellie piled up in bed under a quilt, and Little Jebb crouched by the hearth, where a low fire simmered. "Howdy," I said to Dellie, "how you feeling?"

Her big eyes, the whites surprising and glaring in the black face, fixed on me as I stood there, but she did not reply. It did not look like Dellie, or act like Dellie, who would grumble and bustle around our kitchen, talking to herself, scolding me or Little Jebb, clanking pans, making all sorts of unnecessary noises and mutterings like an old-fashioned black steam thrasher engine when it has got up an extra head of steam and keeps popping the governor and rumbling and shaking on its wheels. But now Dellie just lay up there on the bed, under the patchwork quilt, and turned the black face, which I scarcely recognized, and the glaring white eyes to me.

"How you feeling?" I repeated.

"I'se sick," the voice said croakingly out of the strange black face which was not attached to Dellie's big, squat body, but stuck out from under a pile of tangled bedclothes. Then the voice added: "Mighty sick."

"I'm sorry," I managed to say.

The eyes remained fixed on me for a moment, then they left me and the head rolled back on the pillow. "Sorry," the voice said, in a flat way which wasn't question or statement of anything. It was just the empty word put into the air with no meaning or expression, to float off like a feather or a puff of smoke, while the big eyes, with the whites like the peeled white of hard-boiled eggs, stared at the ceiling.

"Dellie," I said after a minute, "there's a tramp up at the house. He's got a knife."

She was not listening. She closed her eyes.

I tiptoed over to the hearth where Jebb was and crouched beside him. We began to talk in low voices. I was asking him to get out his train and play train. Old Jebb had put spool wheels on three cigar boxes and put wire links between the boxes to make a train for Jebb. The box that was the locomotive had the top closed and a length of broom stick for a smoke stack. Jebb didn't want to get the train out, but I told him I would go home if he didn't. So he got out the train, and the colored rocks, and fossils of crinoid stems, and other junk he used for the load, and we began to push it around, talking the way we thought trainmen talked, making a chuck-chucking sound under the breath for the noise of the locomotive and now and then uttering low, cautious toots for the whistle. We got so interested in playing train that the toots got louder. Then, before he thought, Jebb gave a good, loud toot-toot, blowing for a crossing.

"Come here," the voice said from the bed.

Jebb got up slow from his hands and knees, giving me a sudden, naked, inimical look.

"Come here!" the voice said.

Jebb went to the bed. Dellie propped herself weakly up on one arm, muttering, "Come closer."

Jebb stood closer.

"Last thing I do, I'm gonna do it," Dellie said. "Done tole you to be quiet."

Then she slapped him. It was an awful slap, more awful for the kind of weakness which it came from and brought to focus. I had seen her slap Jebb before, but the slapping had always been the kind of easy slap you would expect from a good-natured, grumbling Negro woman like Dellie. But this was different. It was awful. It was so awful that Jebb didn't make a sound. The tears just popped out and ran down his face, and his breath came sharp, like gasps.

Dellie fell back. "Cain't even be sick," she said to the ceiling. "Git sick and they won't even let you lay. They tromp all over you. Cain't even be sick." Then she closed her eyes.

I went out of the room. I almost ran getting to the door, and I did run across the porch and down the steps and across the yard, not caring whether or not I stepped on the filth which had washed out from under the cabin. I ran almost all the way home. Then I thought about my mother catching me with the bare feet. So I went down to the stables.

I heard a noise in the crib, and opened the door. There was Big Jebb, sitting on an old nail keg, shelling corn into a bushel basket. I went in, pulling the door shut behind me, and crouched on the floor near him. I crouched there for a couple of minutes before either of us spoke, and watched him shelling the corn.

He had very big hands, knotted and grayish at the joints, with calloused palms which seemed to be streaked with rust, with the rust coming up between the fingers to show from the back. His hands were so strong and tough that he could take a big ear of corn and rip the grains right off the cob with the palm of his hand, all in one motion like a machine. "Work long as me," he would say, "and the good Lawd'll give you a hand lak cass-ion won't nuthin' hurt." And his hands did look like cast iron, old cast iron streaked with rust.

Blackberry Winter

Robert Penn Warren

He was an old man, up in his seventies, thirty years or more older than Dellie, but he was strong as a bull. He was a squat sort of man, heavy in the shoulders, with remarkably long arms, the kind of build they say the river natives have on the Congo from paddling so much in their boats. He had a round bullet-head, set on powerful shoulders. His skin was very black, and the thin hair on his head was now grizzled like tufts of old cotton batting. He had small eyes and a flat nose, not big, and the kindest and wisest old face in the world, the blunt, sad, wise face of an old animal peering tolerantly out on the goings-on of the merely human creatures before him. He was a good man, and I loved him next to my mother and father. I crouched there on the floor of the crib and watched him shell corn with the rusty cast-iron hands, while he looked down at me out of the little eyes set in the blunt face.

"Dellie says she's mighty sick," I said.

"Yeah," he said.

"What's she sick from?"

"Woman-mizry," he said.

"What's woman-mizry?"

"Hit comes on 'em," he said. "Hit jest comes on 'em when the time comes."

"What is it?"

"Hit is the change," he said. "Hit is the change of life and time."

"What changes?"

"You too young to know."

"Tell me."

"Time come and you find out everthing."

I knew that there was no use in asking him any more. When I asked him things and he said that, I always knew that he would not tell me. So I continued to crouch there and watch him. Now that I had sat there a little while, I was cold again.

"What you shiver fer?" he asked me.

"I'm cold. I'm cold because it's blackberry winter," I said.

"Maybe 'tis and maybe 'tain't," he said.

"My mother says it is."

"Ain't sayen Miss Sallie doan know and ain't sayen she do. But folks doan know everthing."

"Why isn't it blackberry winter?"

"Too late fer blackberry winter. Blackberries done bloomed."

"She said it was."

"Blackberry winter jest a leetle cold spell. Hit come and then hit go away, and hit is growed summer of a sudden lak a gunshot. Ain't no telien hit will go way this time."

"It's June," I said.

"June," he replied with great contempt. "That what folks say. What June mean? Maybe hit is come cold to stay."

"Why?"

"'Cause this-here old yearth is tahrd. Hit is tahrd and ain't gonna perduce. Lawd let hit come rain one time forty days and forty nights, 'cause He was tahrd of sinful folks. Maybe this-here old yearth say to the Lawd, Lawd, I done plum tahrd, Uwd, lemme rest. And Uwd say, Yearth, you done yore best, you give 'em cawn and you give 'em taters, and all they think on is they gut, and, Yearth, you kin take a rest."

"What will happen?"

"Folks will eat up everthing. The yearth won't perduce no more. Folks cut down all the trees and burn 'em 'cause they cold, and the yearth won't grow no more. I been tellen 'em. I been tellen folks. Sayen, maybe this year, hit is the time. But they doan listen to me, how the yearth is tahrd. Maybe this year they find out."

"Will everything die?"

"Everthing and everbody, hit will be so."

"This year?"

"Ain't no tellen. Maybe this year."

"My mother said it is blackberry winter," I said confidently, and got up.

"Ain't sayen nuthin' agin Miss Sallie," he said.

I went to the door of the crib. I was really cold now. Running, I had got up a sweat and now I was worse.

I hung on the door, looking at Jebb, who was shelling corn again.

"There's a tramp came to the house," I said. I had almost forgotten the tramp.

"Yeah."

"He came by the back way. What was he doing down there in the storm?"

"They comes and they goes," he said, "and ain't no tellen."

"He had a mean knife."

"The good ones and the bad ones, they comes and they goes. Storm or sun, light or dark. They is folks and they comes and they goes lak folks."

I hung on the door, shivering.

He studied me a moment, then said, "You git on to the house. You ketch yore death. Then what yore mammy say?"

I hesitated.

"You git," he said.

When I came to the back yard, I saw that my father was standing by the back porch and the tramp was walking toward him. They began talking before I reached them, but I got there just as my father was saying, "I'm sorry, but I haven't got any work. I got all the hands on the place I need now. I won't need any extra until wheat thrashing."

I walked along until we got within sight of the big gate that let on the pike. Then I said, "Where did you come from?"

The stranger made no reply, just looked at my father.

My father took out his leather coin purse, and got out a half-dollar. He held it toward the man. "This is for half a day," he said.

Blackberry Winter

Robert Penn Warren

The man looked at the coin, and then at my father, making no motion to take the money. But that was the right amount. A dollar a day was what you paid them back in 1910. And the man hadn't even worked half a day.

Then the man reached out and took the coin. He dropped it into the right side pocket of his coat. Then he said, very slowly and without feeling, "I didn't want to work on your —— farm."

He used the word which they would have frailed me to death for using.

I looked at my father's face and it was streaked white under the sunburn. Then he said, "Get off this place. Get off this place or I won't be responsible."

The man dropped his right hand into his pants pocket. It was the pocket where he kept the knife. I was just about to yell to my father about the knife when the hand came back out with nothing in it. The man gave a kind of twisted grin, showing where the teeth had been knocked out above the new scar. I thought that instant how maybe he had tried before to pull a knife on somebody else and had got his teeth knocked out.

So now he just gave that twisted, sickish grin out of the unmemorable, grayish face, and then spat on the brick path. The glob landed just about six inches from the toe of my father's right boot. My father looked down at it, and so did I. I thought that if the glob had hit my father's boot, something would have happened. I looked down and saw the bright glob, and on one side of it my father's strong cowhide boots, with the brass eyelets and the leather thongs, heavy boots splashed with good red mud and set solid on the bricks, and on the other side the pointed-toe, broken, black shoes, on which the mud looked so sad and out of place. Then I saw one of the black shoes move a little, just a twitch first, then a real step backward.

The man moved in a quarter circle to the end of the porch, with my father's steady gaze upon him all the while. At the end of the porch, the man reached up to the shelf where the wash pans were to get his little newspaper-wrapped parcel. Then he disappeared around the corner of the house and my father mounted the porch and went into the kitchen without a word.

I followed around the house to see what the man would do. I wasn't afraid of him now, no matter if he did have the knife. When I got around in front, I saw him going out the yard gate and starting up the drive toward the pike. So I ran to catch up with him. He was sixty yards or so up the drive before I caught up.

I did not walk right up even with him at first, but trailed him, the way a kid will, about seven or eight feet behind, now and then running two or three steps in order to hold my place against his longer stride. When I first came up behind him, he turned to give me a look, just a meaningless took, and then fixed his eyes up the drive and kept on walking.

When we had got around the bend in the drive which cut the house from sight, and were going along by the edge of the woods, I decided to come up even with him. I ran a few steps, and was by his side, or almost, but some feet off to the right. I walked along in this position for a while, and he never noticed me. I walked along until we got within sight of the big gate that let on the pike.

Then I said, "Where did you come from?"

He looked at me then with a look which seemed almost surprised that I was there. Then he said, "It ain't none of yore business."

We went on another fifty feet.

Then I said, "Where are you going?"

He stopped, studied me dispassionately for a moment, then suddenly took a step toward me and leaned his face down at me. The lips jerked back, but not in any grin, to show where the teeth were knocked out and to make the scar on the lower lip come white with the tension.

He said, "Stop following me. You don't stop following me and I cut yore throat, you little son-of-a-bitch."

Then he went on to the gate, and up the pike.

That was thirty-five years ago. Since that time my father and mother have died. I was still a boy, but a big boy, when my father got cut on the blade of a mowing machine and died of lockjaw. My mother sold the place and went to town to live with her sister. But she never took hold after my father's death, and she died within three years, right in middle life. My aunt always said, "Sallie just died of a broken heart, she was so devoted." Dellie is dead, too, but she died, I heard, quite a long time after we sold the farm.

As for Little Jebb, he grew up to be a mean and ficey Negro. He killed another Negro in a fight and got sent to the penitentiary, where he is yet, the last I heard tell. He probably grew up to be mean and ficey from just being picked on so much by the children of the other tenants, who were jealous of Jebb and Dellie for being thrifty and clever and being white-folks' niggers.

Old Jebb lived forever. I saw him ten years ago and he was about a hundred then, and not looking much different. He was living in town then, on relief—that was back in the Depression—when I went to see him. He said to me: "Too strong to die. When I was a young feller just comen on and seen how things wuz, I prayed the Lawd. I said, Oh, Lawd, gimme strength and meke me strong fer to do and to in-dure. The Lawd hearkened to my prayer. He give me strength. I was in-duren proud fer being strong and me much man. The Lawd give me my prayer and my strength. But now He done gone off and fergot me and left me alone with my strength. A man doan know what to pray fer, and him mortal."

Jebb is probably living yet, as far as I know.

That is what has happened since the morning when the tramp leaned his face down at me and showed his teeth and said: "Stop following me. You don't stop following me and I cut yore throat, you little son-of-a-bitch." That was what he said, for me not to follow him. But I did follow him, all the years. ●

BY H. R. STONEBACK

In his tribute to Robert Penn Warren, H. R. Stoneback says Warren's achievements as a poet, novelist and critic are unexcelled.

Homage: A Letter to Robert Penn Warren

Harry R. Stoneback, Distinguished Professor of Literature at the State University of New York (New Paltz), is also a Pied Piper of Kentucky literature. He has taught it for more than thirty years, and frequently brings his students to the source. In 1973-74, when he was teaching in France, he wrote a letter to Robert Penn Warren in the form of a long poem. It made its way to Warren, who liked it, and he and Stoneback corresponded for many years. In 2004, Stoneback added a coda to the poem, and in 2005 the old and new sections were published together as *Homage: A Letter To Robert Penn Warren* (Portals Press, New Orleans 2005). The book is a tribute to Warren, the Commonwealth's greatest writer, on the 100th anniversary of his birth in Guthrie, Kentucky. Here are some excerpts.

1973-1974

Now as I write I am here in Loire-Atlantique country
and I am thinking of Guthrie,
about that time when I was writing my dissertation
and I heard at Vandy that you were there, up the road,
so I mounted my battered rusty fifty-dollar pickup-truck
(with holes in the floor, no headlights, no brakes)
headed toward the Kentucky line, hearing the road-whine,
watching black-dazzle pass beneath the rusted floor
and ragged rubber mat under my feet.
I was disguised perhaps in dissociated bib overalls
(I'd been working in the garden when I took a notion to go)
but they were genuinely dirty and authentic
(not graduate-student kitsch)
as were the objective sour-deens and correlative
crackers I ate as I drove. Pulled into your brother's grain-mill.
Found him among the silos, talked to him and some locals.
Said I'd heard Tate say at Vandy that Red was in town,
said I'd driven up from Nashville to see you about something
I was writing. Your brother reckoned
you might be out to the house and did I have a message—
he might get you on the phone—and I allowed as how
I'd stop by later and no, I had no message to leave.
So I walked the streets of Guthrie and talked to locals
about Red Warren and bought seed potatoes at the hardware
store, then drove back roads the rest of the day
thinking what can a man say?
Leaving town, I stopped at some junk-antique shop
and bought some ancient smooth-handled rusty farm tool
that I have lost somewhere over the years
and cannot even recollect what it was precisely.
But I remember holding it and turning it curiously,
running hand and fingers, flexing my palm on the time-worn
wood, glancing at it on the wiresprung upholstery on the seat
beside me as I drove with one arm out the window
in the long slanting coolness,
as I drove in the greengolden timeless late afternoon
down to Nashville
feeling not entirely a fool.

I am trying to be exact here,
to remember things in their proper order.
So, let's see: I have shaken your hand,
I have talked to you,
I have talked to your brother,
but what can a man say?

Shall I say I have found your textbooks useful,
your essays incisive, sometimes wonderful?
I have taught your novels, usually with delight,
attacked the best of them
(from some Faulkner-Hemingway gold-standard)
and defended the worst of them
which are, of course, better than anything else being written
now. I have taught your poetry, almost all of it,
carried fragile issues of *The Fugitive* in my briefcase
for grad-students to touch in class.

When pressed by students to make direct statement
on the matter, I have emphatically declared:
"Literature is not a horse-race.
But, yes, Mr. Warren is our greatest living Man of Letters,
our greatest living writer.
(Most assuredly, my father—no mean poet—would say)."
I have been impatient, dismissive, with colleagues
who purport to survey, teach, know American Literature
and have not even read *Brother to Dragons*.

2004

After I came home from that year in Paris and Brittany,
about the same time you received my long poem,
I bought a tobacco-farm in Kentucky
and considered moving back South, leaving New York.
Spent a sabbatical on the farm, wrote my Agrarian Novel
that owed as much to you as to Roberts and Faulkner.
I don't even know which closet it is buried in.

And if things must be stripped and fall away
what shall we pray is the last thing taken from us?

The body's glory is first to go, though it seemed as secure
at 60 as it did in the immortal invulnerable glow of 30.
(At least we learned before it was too late
the body's job: to educate the soul
as the true soul illuminates the flesh)

Shall I, mindful of your case (and Hemingway's), pray:
"Let writing be the last thing taken from me"?

I know nothing sadder than the words you wrote
to me—when I congratulated you on your Poet
Laureateship—how it was a nice thing to have
now that you could no longer write,
how you remembered little of old poems,
and all were old now.

(Ah but if you can still sing, still write, teach,
still shape a vision with passion and precision,
still pursue The Good with kindness and decency,
still love all those who yearn for Grace and Truth,
how can it matter that you cannot walk,
run, swim, if you have the heart's hymn of amplitude
and the mind's mirror of exactitude.
It is not necessary now to look back
at the flesh's glory: prepare for Counterattack.)

Does the Father always forgive the Prodigal Son?
Will all the sons forgive the Prodigal Father?
And how shall we ever repay all our debts?

I remember the last phone conversation we had,
how my memory struggled against forgetting to thank you
for this: that a few of us still fight the counterinsurgency
against the Death of Joy, the Death of History.

Influence perhaps, but no anxiety:
I don't need two hands to count all the poets
who have truly moved me: Donne, Wordsworth
(Freshman Fevers), boyhood Byron and Whitman
(12-year-old saturation turned to wry retaliation),
Eliot, Stevens, Baudelaire, Perse, Warren...
There are of course other debts forgotten,
debts of craft, or belief, moments here and there,
as in Pound and Yeats, Dante and Shakespeare
and others that could not be swallowed whole.
And there are certain Biblical writers,
hymn-makers, songwriters, folkpoets.
And maybe every true writer ever born
owes near everything to all true writers who came before:
echoes, images, textures, rhythms—borrowed, stolen.

For fiction, a shorter list:
After Classic Comics,
then Wolfe (once upon a time—good for high-school
poets and AWOL Marines),
Joyce, Fitzgerald, Lawrence,
Roberts, O'Connor (one book each)
and still, almost all of Faulkner, Hemingway and Warren.

Literary criticism (yes it matters)
the shortest list of all: Ransom, Tate, Eliot, Warren.

You are the only writer on all three lists.
You get the prize. And consider this:

Balanchine, a devout man, wanted elephants to dance,
but they bellowed their resistance—
they were pragmatic pachyderms, they detested Stravinsky.
Your writing is not ballet but it makes elephants fly. ●

H. R. Stoneback is Distinguished Professor of English at the State University of New York (New Paltz), where he has taught since 1969. He has also taught at the University of Paris (1973-74) and Peking University (1984), and at Vanderbilt University where he received his Ph.D. in 1970. He has written (or edited) eight books, and published four volumes of poetry.

Kentucky Chautauqua

Bringing history to life includes discovering Kentucky performers who are as remarkable as the characters they portray.

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. In the case of Price Hollowell, who was at the center of a memorable episode in the Black Patch War in western Kentucky a hundred years ago, we are proud to introduce a performer who is as remarkable as the character he portrays. Ethan Sullivan Smith, our youngest ever Chautauquan, is not yet old enough to drive himself to his performances, but once he gets there, the results are electric.

Audiences are entranced by his enthusiasm, his stage presence, his credibility, and, above all, the power, clarity, and expressiveness of his delivery. As one audience member put it, "Ethan was *good*." A program coordinator wrote: "All of the feedback I got was that this program was the best in a long time."

Ethan Smith portrays Price Hollowell, who was twelve years old when the Night Riders attacked the Hollowell farm in Caldwell County on the night of May 2, 1907. As they terrorized Price and his parents, one of the Riders boasted, "We Night Riders fear no judge or jury!" But Price saw everything they did, and made them eat their words when his testimony in federal court proved crucial in winning a large judgement against the men who attacked the Hollowells that night.

He is not yet old enough to drive himself to his performances, but once he gets there, the results are electric.

Low tobacco prices caused the Black Patch War, a western Kentucky conflict that produced mayhem of a sort not seen in those parts since the Civil War. The Black Patch War was named after the dark leaf tobacco grown in west Kentucky and Tennessee. The American Tobacco Company was paying less for dark tobacco than it cost farmers to grow it. The farmers fought back by forming the Planters' Protective Association, whose members withheld their tobacco from the market. When this strategy did not produce higher prices, some members—the Night Riders—resorted to violence against farmers, like the Hollowells, who refused to honor the boycott. The Night Riders ran the Hollowells out of the state, but they returned and filed a federal lawsuit. Thanks in large part to Price's dramatic testimony, they won damages of $35,000.

Ethan Sullivan Smith as Price Hollowell, Black Patch War Hero

Ethan Sullivan Smith lives in Cynthiana and attends Harrison County High School. He is a three-time state champion in public speaking and prose interpretation at the middle school level. Smith has been performing since he was six years old. His credits include the Georgetown Children's Theatre and the Kentucky On Stage series at Georgetown College.

Ethan Smith's performances as Price Hollowell are a vivid illustration of what we mean when we say we're Telling Kentucky's Story. Please visit our web site—**kyhumanities.com**—for more information on Kentucky Chautauqua. ●

Kentucky Humanities Council, Inc.
206 East Maxwell Street
University of Kentucky
Lexington, KY 40506-0315
859/257-5932