

Kentucky

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Standing Up for Her Sex *page 7*

Eliza Calvert Hall of Bowling Green was an uncompromising advocate for women's rights, and she relished a good fight.

"Sally Ann's Experience" *page 14*

In 1898, many magazines found Eliza Calvert Hall's most famous short story too hot to handle.

A Killing Gentleman *page 27*

The dueling ground was familiar territory for Alexander McClung, the feared Black Knight of the South.

Plus:
Our Lincoln Triumphs
Photography by Don Ament



Extraordinary Kentuckians—Famous, and Not

Dear Friends,

On pages 34-35 of this issue of *Kentucky Humanities*, you'll see a report on *Our Lincoln*, the musical and dramatic extravaganza we presented in February to mark the beginning of Kentucky's celebration of Abraham Lincoln's 200th birthday. Forgive our immodesty, but we think it was terrific, and a sold-out house at the Singletary Center for the Arts in Lexington seemed to agree.

Lincoln, Kentucky's greatest son, is the most written-about American who ever lived. His greatness is unquestioned, and it's appropriate for the Council and the Commonwealth to go all out for his bicentennial on February 12, 2009. Over the next two years, we will try to help Kentuckians gain a deeper understanding of Lincoln and his legacy—Lincoln project grants, Chautauqua performances in communities and schools, and special publications are some of the ways we'll do it.

But if the list of extraordinary Kentuckians begins with Lincoln, it hardly ends with him. In this issue of our magazine, you'll meet a worthy but largely forgotten member of the extraordinary Kentuckians club—a compelling “unknown” named Eliza Calvert Hall. That was the pen name of Bowling Green native Lida Calvert Obenchain, whose matronly aspect hid the soul of a freethinker. Born in 1856, Hall thought there were a few things in this world that needed changing, and she didn't mind saying so in the pages of the *New York Times*, not to mention in her bestselling fiction. A good fight was just her cup of tea.

Our article on Hall is by Lynn Niedermeier, author of the brilliant biography *Eliza Calvert Hall, Kentucky Author and Suffragist*. We follow Niedermeier's article with Hall's most famous short story, “Sally Ann's Experience.” Quaint, comic, and pointed, many magazines found it too hot to handle 110 years ago. It's still a good read.

Too hot to handle is a perfect description of another obscure Kentuckian you'll get to know in this issue. Unlike Eliza Calvert Hall, Alexander Keith McClung, a native of Mason County, could hardly be called a force for enlightenment. As Jim Prichard reports, McClung represented a dark and bloody Southern tradition: he was a notorious and feared duelist known as the Black Knight of the South.

In these pages, you'll also find the photographs of Don Ament, who loves trees. He took the heartstopping shot of a sycamore that graces the cover. A portfolio of his work begins on page 20. And there's more, including the art of quilts in Elliott County and Sidney Saylor Farr on snake handling.

As always, thank you for your support. Please let us know what you think of our work, and get ready for a special Lincoln issue of *Kentucky Humanities* in October.

Virginia G. Carter, Publisher





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FEATURES

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Eliza Calvert Hall of Bowling Green was a housewife who found time to write best-selling fiction as well as opinion pieces for national publications. In both, as Lynn Niedermeier reports, she was an uncompromising advocate for women's rights, especially the ballot.

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In 1898, many magazines found Eliza Calvert Hall's most famous short story too hot to handle. It was quaint, comic, and perfectly clear about the injustices women suffered at the hands of their narrow-minded men.

20 Don Ament

Lexington photographer Don Ament says his work is an "attempt to give voice to a planet we have forgotten how to care for." The planet seems to speak especially eloquently when Ament trains his camera on trees, including the sycamore on our cover.

27 A Killing Gentleman

The dueling ground was familiar territory for Alexander McClung, the feared Black Knight of the South. A native of Mason County, McClung was a political journalist, orator and war hero, but Jim Prichard writes that he is remembered mainly as a notorious duelist.

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Our Lincoln thrills a sold-out house.

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On the cover: The Guardian, by Don Ament: "Cold February. Fayette County, Kentucky. Clearing winter storm. Leaping the fence. Scattering the cattle. Buffeted by wind. Crouching low. Handheld camera. Pull the trigger. Again, quickly, it's over."



Windmill: This barn was built during the Depression using materials from several smaller buildings.



The Homestead: Kendrick Holbrook, an Elliott County native studying art at Morehead State University, painted this 15x50-foot mural.

Quilt Crazy

A staple of Kentucky culture turns into public art in Elliott County

QUILTS aren't just for the bed or the sofa or even the wall any more—now they're for the barn too. That's because of a movement begun in Ohio a few years ago: the creation of giant quilt squares to decorate barns.

Donna Sue Groves of Adams County, Ohio, put up the first one to honor her mother. It was an eight-foot by eight-foot square painted with one of her mother's quilt designs. It proved so popular that Groves raised money to do more, form-

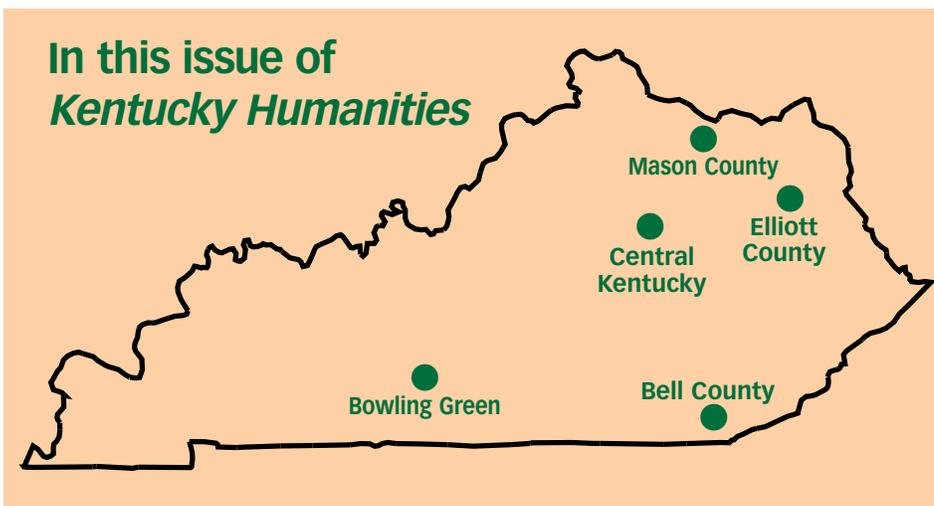
ing a "quilt trail." The concept quickly spread to Kentucky, where quilt squares can now be seen on barns in more than two dozen counties. The idea is to entice tourists off the main roads, benefiting the counties economically by turning a distinctive element of Kentucky culture into public art.

Elliott County, in the far eastern reaches of the state, is one Kentucky locale that has gone barn-quilt crazy. The first one went up in October 2005,

and there are now 65 quilt squares on view in Elliott, along with two barn-side murals of local life (fifteen are planned). The sparkplug has been Gwenda Adkins, longtime University of Kentucky Extension Agent for Family and Consumer Sciences in Elliott County. Adkins says a \$95-thousand grant from the W. Paul and Lucille Caudill Little Foundation ignited the local explosion of barn quilts, paying for the heavy 8x8 sign board squares and the painting of designs chosen by a committee. The Grayson Rural Electric cooperative has hung them all at no charge.

"In thirty years," says Adkins, "it's the best community building project I've ever done. It's hard to get people to volunteer, but once the first square went up, the phones didn't stop ringing. People wanted to work. It gave people pride. It made people look at where we are and who we are and be proud of their heritage." Historic barns are also part of that heritage, and the quilt project has been good for them. Adkins says a number of barns have been spruced up to receive their quilt squares. When she called to ask permission to hang the county's very first square, the barn owner paused, then asked, "Can I paint it first?"

Is Elliott County's quilt trail actually attracting tourists off the interstate? Adkins says she can't prove it statistically, but she's convinced it's working.





July Summer Sky

Here's how to see it for yourself: Get off I-64 at Grayson and head south about 20 miles to the Elliott County seat, Sandy Hook. About three miles out of town you'll find the Laurel Gorge Cultural Heritage Center. They'll give you a list of the quilts and a county map (a map with GPS locations is under development). All of Elliott County's barn quilts are visible from the road, but you are free to walk on to the properties to get a closer look or take a picture (barn owners have given permission in advance).

"It made people look at where we are and who we are and be proud of their heritage."

For more information on Elliott County's quilt trail, call Gwenda Adkins at 606/738-6400. For other counties, call Judy Sizemore at 606/364-5831.



Feathered Star: Grayson Rural Electric donated the hanging of all of Elliott County's barn quilts.



Spider Web



Darting Minnows



Happy Hunting Ground

Snake-Handling Saints

Growing up in Bell County, Kentucky, Sidney Saylor Farr heard a lot of talk about snake-handling. As she writes in this excerpt from her 2007 memoir, the practice was a source of endless fascination to her elders.

BY SIDNEY SAYLOR FARR

And these signs shall follow them that believe. In my name they shall cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues, they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them. They shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover. —Mark 16:17, 18

MY Dad, Grandpa, and various other relatives used to sit on our front porch or around the heating-stove in the living room and critically examine the subject of snake

handlers in our community and in other parts of the mountains.

History tells us that snake handling as a religious practice started with a man named George Hensley in 1909. He was “searching the Scriptures for a text for a Sunday sermon” he told people. He came across Mark 16:17, 18. He read the verses again and again, and testified that it was like a bright light being turned on in his head. Could a person, filled with the spirit of God, actually handle deadly serpents and not be harmed? He decided to test (or confirm) the Word.

Various people told us Hensley’s story. Grandpa and Dad knew these reports by heart.

I listened to my elders’ talk with horror and fascination. I never actually witnessed a snake-handling service, but my imagination made it seem real to me.

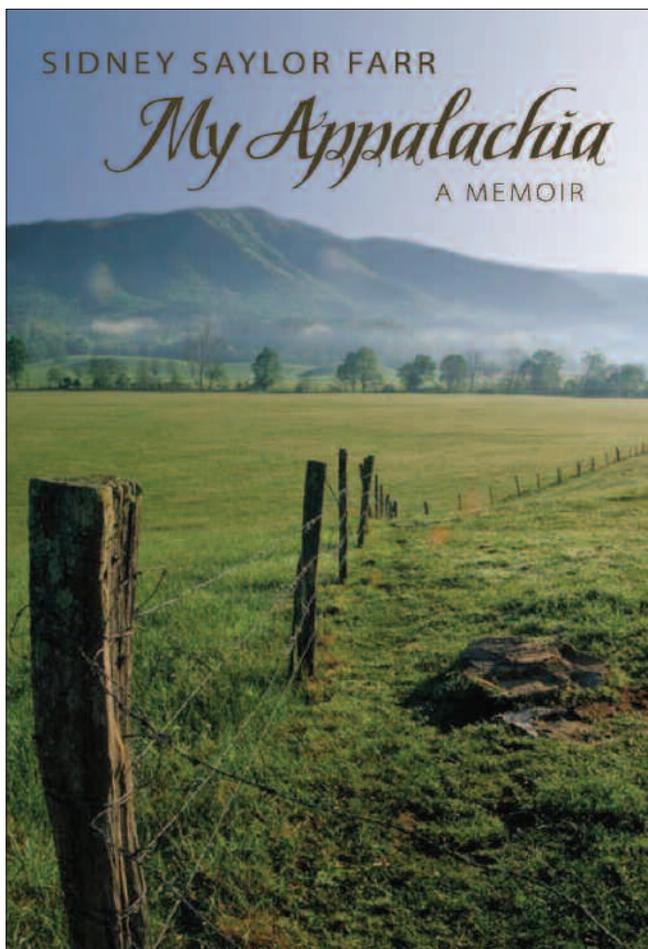
George Hensley climbed up White Oak Mountain in Tennessee and returned with a big, black rattlesnake. He handled the snake during services at his church. Soon other members began to handle snakes also. Eventually one man was bitten and nearly died. The church members then became doubtful and hostile toward Hensley; he left Tennessee and came into Bell County, Kentucky, where he started a church at East Pineville. Soon people in this church were handling snakes, and the practice grew and spread.

Hensley handled snakes for many years, until he was finally bitten and died in Florida in the 1950s—“which goes to show you that if you play with fire long enough you’ll get burned,” Dad said when he and Grandpa talked about Hensley’s death.

The Holiness Church people I knew when I was young did not necessarily handle snakes, but they did believe in glossolalia (speaking in tongues) and various other gifts of the spirit. Some of this group did in later years go across the mountain to Blue Hole in Clay County and join a snake-handling group. A favorite saying among some of these Holiness people was “We are in the world but not of the world, children, praise God! We’re not long for this world, little children; we’re just strangers a-passing through.”

The snake-handling sect has proven itself to be a durable one. It has been outlawed repeatedly in many places only to spring up somewhere else. New devotees are drawn in frequently. At the present time there are snake-handling churches in Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia, North and South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Florida, Ohio, Indiana, and Michigan. (Snake handlers in the last three states mentioned are probably former residents of Appalachia.) In an age when there is ever-increasing skepticism and secularization, the faith of these people who say that they are “confirming the Word of God” is remarkable.

When the mining and timber corporations came into the mountains in the early part of the twentieth century and strip-mining operations began, the mountaineers engaged in a head-on collision with them. In addition, a large number of mountain men were active participants in World War II, and thus encountered some aspects of technology they could never have imagined back home. When these soldiers came home it was inevitable that they would feel marooned, abandoned, and perhaps God-forsaken. When faced with such conditions, people tend to devise religious practices that will dramatically prove that God is still with them, that he will still protect them. Scholars tell us



Sidney Saylor Farr is the former editor of Appalachian Heritage and a former staff member at Berea College. She has written numerous articles and books about Appalachian life and culture.

that snake handling did not arise until mountain culture was in decline...

Scientists tell us that the reason the snakes do not bite more often probably lies in the way they are taken up and handled. The snakes lose their sense of balance, become disoriented, and are utterly bewildered when they are moved through the air to another pair of hands, or draped or twined around a body. But this does not explain why the snakes do not strike the moment the box containing them is opened.

Time after time, in the books and articles I have read on the subject, there are recorded instances of people at the snake meetings kicking the box during the course of the service. When the time comes to handle the snakes, the box is picked up and shaken vigorously in order to irritate the reptiles before the box is opened. The box is then put down and the lid opened. At this point the snakes should be frightened and apt to strike out at anything that moves. Sometimes people do get bitten when the box is opened but, more often than not, they are not harmed at all.

As mentioned earlier, some scholars believe that snake handling is an aspect of crisis theology. The people I knew in Bell County led a drab existence; they were desperate for something, anything, to break the monotony of their lives. Snake handling did that for them to a certain extent. It brought excitement, danger, and bravery into their lives. For a few moments, each time they handled a snake in front of an audience, they were in the limelight. They proved, at least to themselves, that God was still with them, that he was still protecting them. At those times when the anointing was taken away and they were bitten, they still maintained they were doing God's will, and that it was the will of God for them to be bitten in order to prove to the world that the snakes were really dangerous.

In more recent years, a large number of women have become snake handlers. I suspect that these women also crave excitement, danger, and attention. They have long been treated as second-class citizens, bound by rules and restrictions that do not apply to the men.

At the graveside services for Lee Valentine there was almost a riot when the believers fought to handle the snake that had killed him. The police broke up the gathering and killed the snake.

I remember hearing about one particular snake handler when I was a child. His name was Lee Valentine. "That man has suffered about as much as any man put on this earth," Dad said. Valentine had been a moonshiner years before, and perhaps his path had crossed Dad's and Grandpa's from time to time because they also were moonshiners. People said that eight of Valentine's ten children had died of various painful diseases. He worked in the mines after he gave up moonshining and was almost killed in a slate fall. It was reported that his body was crushed under the slate and he was given up to die. A Holiness preacher named Willie Simms prayed for him, and he was healed. They said you could hear the bones snapping back into place, and then Valentine got up out of bed, sat down at the table, and ate a hearty meal.

After his accident in the mines, Lee Valentine joined the Holiness Church and became anointed to preach the gospel. Mama and her friends hero-worshipped him. (I never saw him in person, but I have seen pictures of him; he resembled Jim Backus, the actor.)

Time passed, and we heard that Lee Valentine had joined Shilo Collins's snake-handling church at Blue Hole. Mama and her friends, who did not believe in snake handling, grieved for this man, who had suffered so much and, they felt, had been led astray.

Years later, word came that Lee Valentine had been bitten during a service in either Alabama or Georgia and had died. They brought his body to his old home place near Harlan, Kentucky, for burial.

One notable thing about the snake-handling saints in Bell County was that they did not kill the snake that had caused the death of one of their members. They

believed they would receive some kind of special grace if they handled the same snake. At the graveside services for Lee Valentine there was almost a riot when the believers fought to handle the snake that had killed him. The police broke up the gathering and killed the snake. Later Dad said to Grandpa, "Old Man Howard told me that the man who killed that snake had it skinned and a belt made out of its skin. He wears it ever' day, Old Man Howard said."

The Holiness faith and the Southern Baptist Church were the only religious services I attended as a child and young adult. They taught that God was a fire-and-brimstone God, and they preached about the wages of sin and other evil things. I could never accept what they preached. If God was like they said he was, I wanted nothing to do with him. Later, the Evangelical United Brethren Missionaries established a church in Stoney Fork; sometime after that, this denomination joined with the Methodists and became United Methodist. I joined this church as an adult.

One of my most heart-breaking experiences happened after I had grown up, when Dad was saved and baptized into the Holiness faith. When Dad joined her church, Mama was thrilled and shouted her praises in the church services as she testified. Dad, as a new convert, became a zealous worker in his church. One day he came to my house and started telling me about the Holiness Church, comparing it with the mission church to which I belonged and urging me to leave my church and join his. I could not be persuaded to renounce my church. Dad pleaded with such fervor that he started crying. This I can never forget.

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Whether she was promoting women's rights in her bestselling fiction or in articles in national publications, Bowling Green author Eliza Calvert Hall was an uncompromising advocate who relished a good fight.

Standing Up for Her Sex



All images courtesy of the Kentucky Library and Museum, Western Kentucky University

“You set right down and hear what I’ve got to say.”

WITH this command, a diminutive woman in black yarn mittens and an old black bonnet freezes the male parishioners of her country church. It is a Sunday morning in Goshen, Kentucky, in the years just before the Civil War, and Sally Ann Flint is about to teach a lesson in the art of plain speaking.

What has provoked her outburst? The men of Sally Ann’s congregation are ready to expel a mother who has confessed to taking church funds to pay for a last visit to her daughter, dying in another city. The woman had begged her husband to give her the money for the trip, but he had refused, even though, as Sally Ann knows, this now-penniless wife had surrendered her life savings to him upon their marriage.

Eliza Calvert Hall was the pen name of Lida Calvert Obenchain. At this point, probably around the time of her marriage in 1885, when she was 29, she had worked as a schoolteacher and principal, and published several poems in leading magazines.



Above left: Thomas C. Calvert, Lida's father. After he fled Bowling Green under cover of darkness to escape a charge of embezzlement, his family endured more than a decade of financial hardship.



Above right: Margaret Younglove Calvert, Lida's mother. Her efforts to provide for her children after her husband's flight provided a model of female "gumption and grit" for the future author of "Sally Ann's Experience."

What is worse, one of the elders has tried to quash Sally Ann's protest of this state of affairs with a favorite biblical injunction. She is welcome, he tells her, to declaim her religious experience before the assembly, but any impertinence toward its male leadership must be subject to the Apostle Paul's decree, "Let your women keep silence in the church."

Sally Ann not only ignores him, she turns the tables. "I can give my experience, can I? Well, that's jest what I'm a-doin'," she retorts. As the men sit in guilty silence, she begins her enumeration, by turns angry, tragic, and comic, of the many injustices these narrow-minded farmers have perpetrated against their wives—exploiting their household labor, appropriating their money, and begrudging them even the necessities of life. Witness to a conspiracy of law, religious dogma, and men's "natural meanness," Sally Ann has concluded that "it's better to be a Kentucky horse than a Kentucky woman."

SALLY Ann Flint was the title character of a short story, "Sally Ann's Experience," that appeared in the July, 1898 issue of the *Cosmopolitan*, a leading national monthly magazine of fiction, news, and commentary. The story was presented as the reminiscence of an

elderly woman named Aunt Jane, a charming narrator who is as tickled by Sally Ann's scandalous "reprovin'" of the men as she is secure in the memories of her own democratic marriage. Other popular periodicals had rejected the story as too edgy and irreverent—not likely to be received "in the right spirit," judged the *Ladies' Home Journal*, primly.

Fortunately, John Brisben Walker, the *Cosmopolitan* editor, took a chance, and the public eagerly rewarded his gamble. Before long, magazines as far away as New Zealand were asking to reprint "Sally Ann's Experience." Dramatic readers and elocutionists loved its arresting speeches and rural dialect, and hastened to add it to their repertoires. Letters of praise and gratitude began to stream into the home of the story's author, Eliza Calvert Hall.

Like Sally Ann, Eliza Calvert Hall was an ordinary woman with a lot to say, but her own remarkable story is a nearly forgotten chapter of Kentucky history. Over the next decade, she would contribute fourteen more stories to the *Cosmopolitan*. The first of her five books, *Aunt Jane of Kentucky*, spent a year on the best-seller list, drew enthusiastic praise from none other than

President Theodore Roosevelt, and ultimately appeared in more than thirty editions. Her major work of nonfiction, a study of the traditional art of coverlet weaving, brought recognition and economic benefit to the craftspeople of her home state and beyond. "Sally Ann's Experience," in particular, maintained an enduring hold on the popular heart. In 1911, a year after the story's reissue in book form, it sold twelve thousand copies.

ELIZA Calvert Hall's real name was Eliza Calvert Obenchain (she took her pen name from her paternal grandmother), and she lived in Bowling Green, Kentucky with her husband and four young children. Known as "Lida" to family and friends, she was forty-two years old at the time of her breakthrough into fiction, but was hardly a novice writer. Only months before "Sally Ann's Experience," Lida's byline had appeared in the *New York Times* over a series of commentaries on topics including older woman-younger man marriages, fair wages for women, and even the right of a woman to disdain cultural norms of attractiveness and just "be ugly." Fore-shadowing the complaints of the fictional Sally Ann, Lida also decried the tight-fisted husband who, having pledged his

"As a woman, and a Kentucky woman, it seems to me an impertinence for any man to require me to give a reason for wanting the ballot."

worldly goods at the altar, forced his wife to plead for an adequate allowance while he denied the monetary value of her domestic and child care skills.

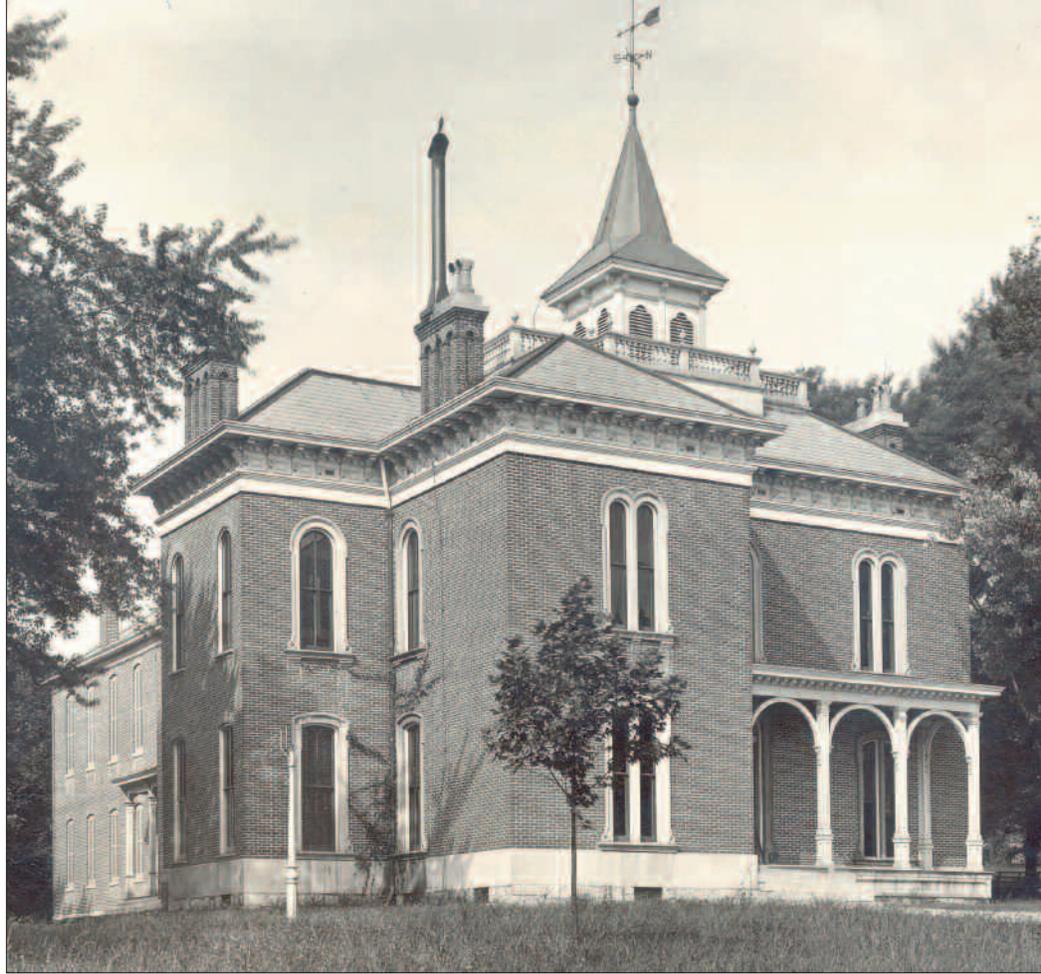
Such journalistic provocation was only one component of Lida's literary crusade on behalf of economic and political equality for women, a battle she waged on two fronts for more than three decades. Combining realism and nostal-

gia, the fiction of Eliza Calvert Hall celebrated ordinary women’s dignity as they confronted both suffocating tradition and bewildering change. At the same time, the essays of Lida Calvert Obenchain argued for full legal and social recognition of women’s humanity. Not only did Lida champion every woman’s right to earn a living, develop her intellect, and be rewarded for her household labor, she called most urgently for “the right protective of all other rights,” the ballot. “Women are citizens of this country and subject to its government,” she declared. “Therefore women ought to vote.”

Given her own “experience,” it would have been surprising if Lida had not spoken up on behalf of her sex. The oldest of five children, she watched her father, Thomas Calvert, prosper in the years after the Civil War. Regularly employed as a bank manager, Calvert grew wealthy through investments in real estate and commodities. When Lida was fourteen, however, his empire imploded upon the discovery that he had been using bank funds to fuel his speculative enterprises. Thrown into bankruptcy, facing prosecution for embezzlement, and fearing the outrage of defrauded citizens and clients, Calvert panicked. Late one November night in 1870, as his wife, Margaret, and their children slept, he fled Bowling Green.

Her father’s desertion left Lida, her mother and siblings facing economic disaster, but Margaret Calvert proved to be a capable and quietly courageous woman. Shrugging off her former status as a millionaire’s wife, she survived by taking in sewing and laundry and reluctantly accepting help from relatives. Eventually, she was able to send her oldest daughter for a year’s education at the Western Female Seminary in Ohio, after which eighteen-year-old Lida dutifully returned home to teach school and help support the family.

Strangely enough, Margaret also received a trickle of money from her fugitive husband. During the thirteen long years he was in flight, Thomas Calvert never betrayed his whereabouts—he may have spent time in Mexico and South America, then wandered through the West from one odd job to another, but no one



Right: William A. Obenchain, Lida’s husband. “He is so funny & stilted & dignified!” remarked his daughter. “Never sees a joke in anything!” But the proud Virginian and Confederate veteran did support suffrage and women’s rights.

Above: Obenchain was president of Ogden College, which occupied the mansion Thomas Calvert had built in 1870 as a home for his family. He suffered financial ruin before they could occupy it.



really knows. Wherever he was, Calvert managed to scrape together a small interest-bearing fund for his wife and, using his brother in Louisville as a go-between, established a clandestine correspondence with her and each of his children.

This slender thread of contact, together with what little money he was able to send, allowed Lida’s father to cling to the prerogatives of family provider and patriarch. While admitting to his wife that she might “have reason for doubting” his business judgment, Calvert earnestly tutored her from afar in matters of household finance and compulsively itemized the few dollars she could expect from him. At the same time, he fantasized that Margaret might yet retain some of the

outward signs of their vanished wealth. While agreeing with her observation that work was “a great panacea,” he cautioned her not to “indulge” in it too freely, and even suggested that she pay one of Bowling Green’s “poor people” to do the ironing! Margaret most likely ignored these instructions until at least 1883, when Governor Luke Blackburn ended Thomas Calvert’s exile with a pardon—“on account of his family,” as one local

From an early age, Lida knew that behind the image of the domestic queen, coddled by her husband and reigning serenely over hearth and cradle, was more likely an underpaid and overworked housewife.

petitioner candidly put it, “who are almost penniless [sic].”

THOUGH Lida never openly reflected on her father’s misdeeds, she must have learned some sobering lessons during this period of her life. First and foremost was the terrifying vulnerability of wives whose financial welfare rested solely in the hands of their husbands. Without separate property or income, such women might be cast into honorable poverty—or worse yet, resort to the dishonorable practices of men. Rationalizing her taking of church funds as “borrowing,” the unfortunate wife in “Sally Ann’s Experience” offers an excuse that Thomas Calvert might have used to justify his own financial schemes. Lida’s youthful experience would also have left her starkly aware of the gulf between Victorian myths about the exalted state of wifehood, especially in the South, and the grim realities of most women’s lives. From an early age, she knew that behind the image of the domestic queen, coddled by her husband and reigning serenely over hearth and cradle, was more likely an underpaid and overworked housewife.

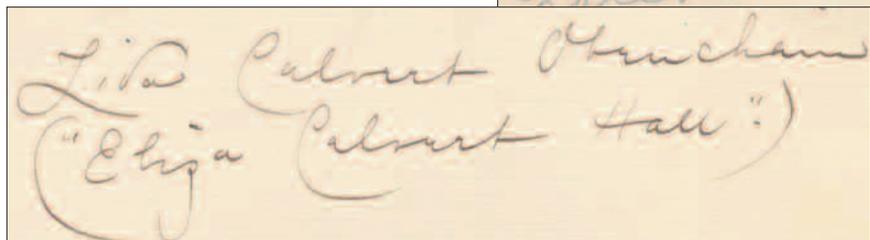
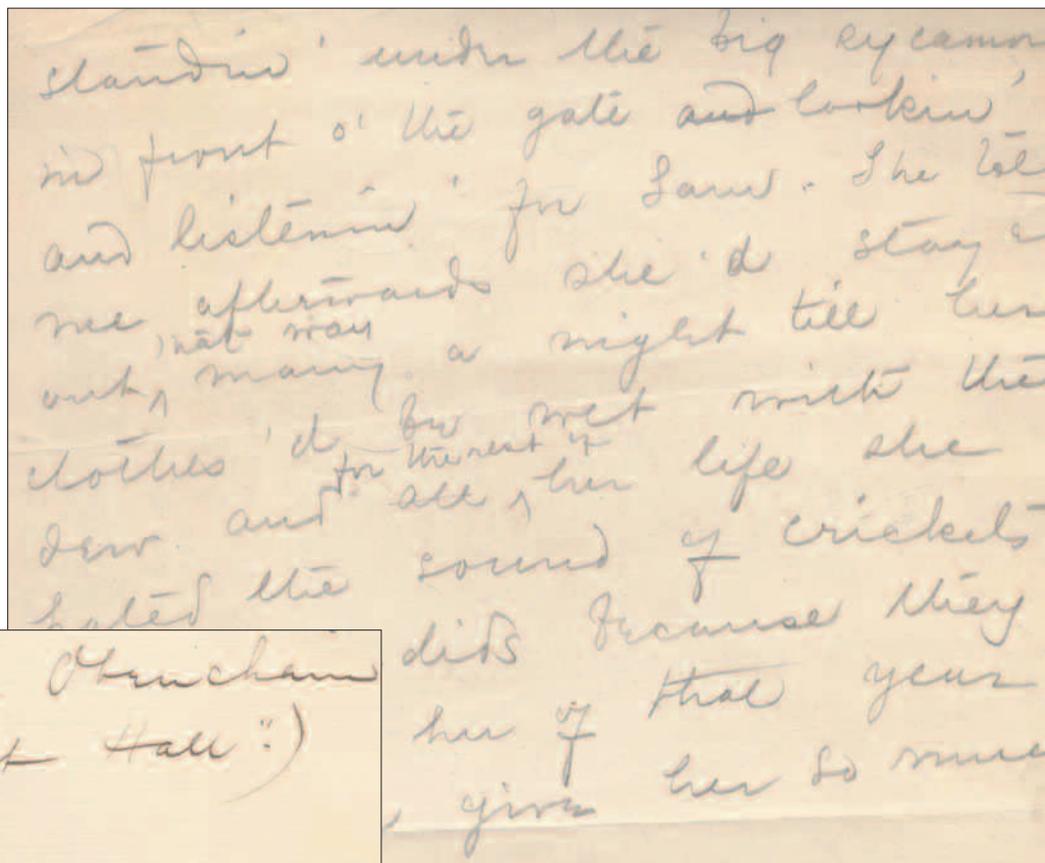
Two years after her father’s reprieve, nevertheless, twenty-nine-year-old Lida was herself a wife. Though she was, by this time, a locally known author of sentimental verse

with several published poems to her credit, marriage to William A. Obenchain almost certainly appealed to the more practical side of her nature. A proud Virginian and starchy ex-Confederate Army officer fifteen years Lida’s senior, he offered a far better model of stability than her father. Out of respect for General Robert E. Lee, his hero and mentor, Obenchain had given up his ambition to be a lawyer and turned to teaching after the war. Admired for his self-discipline and sense of duty, he had recently been appoint-

ed president of Ogden College, a small men’s school in Bowling Green.

As convention dictated, Lida gave up her own teaching career for full-time, traditional domesticity. The blessings of matrimony appeared promptly—a daughter was born in 1887—but so did the familiar burdens. As Lida’s family grew, her husband’s always-modest income failed to meet her expectations of security. “I am penniless and will be till the end of the month,” she complained to her sister one summer, looking ahead to the new semester at Ogden College. In the meantime, she railed at the endless cooking, sewing, cleaning, laundry and other unpaid “drudgery” that was, she charged dramatically, “synonymous with marriage.”

Lida’s story might have ended there, with yet another ordinary woman glumly



Above: Lida’s pen name, Hall, was the maiden name of her paternal grandmother.

Right: A page from Lida’s story “The Reformation of Sam Amos.” When she found a spare moment, she composed in pencil, often on the backs of old mail pieces or scrap paper.



Lida bought this house on Chestnut Street in Bowling Green with royalties from her most successful book of stories, Aunt Jane of Kentucky.

reconciled to her lifelong duty. After the birth of her second child in 1888, however, Lida experienced what she would later term a “conversion,” a turning point that brought her own discontent into focus just as surely as Sally Ann had been galvanized by her friend’s persecution in church.

It began with a summons from the Bluegrass, where the newly formed Kentucky Equal Rights Association and its president, Laura Clay, had begun the work of building a statewide women’s movement. Seven years older than Lida and unmarried, Laura Clay had grown up at White Hall, a large Madison County farm near Richmond owned by her father, Cassius Marcellus Clay. Unlike Lida’s exiled father, Clay had voluntarily left his family for long periods to pursue his career as a politician, diplomat, and abolitionist. Ultimately, Clay’s wife, Mary Jane, was the one who fled their home. After many exhausting years spent supervising her husband’s estate while suffering the embarrassment of his infidelity and neglect, she retreated to her family in Lexington. When Clay divorced her in 1878, Mary Jane received no compensation for her upbringing of his children or her stewardship of his household during their long marriage.

What gave the Clay women common cause with the Calvert women, and even with the fictional women of Sally Ann’s

church, was the enforcement of their poverty and dependency in Kentucky’s antiquated system of laws governing the status of married women. When she took her vows, a Kentucky woman became a legal nonentity—in effect, the ward of her husband, unable to enter contracts or bring a lawsuit in her own name. Her personal effects, her wages, and any income from land she owned became her husband’s property. Barred from making a will herself, a wife who outlived her husband might find in his will guardianship orders for their minor children that she could not challenge. Meanwhile, her claim on his estate was limited to one third of the income from land he owned at his death. With characteristic pungency, Sally Ann would summarize the predicament of such women. “The law gives you the right,” she bitterly reminds the menfolk, “to your wives’ earnin’s and everything they’ve got, down to the clothes on their backs.”

TO secure the passage of new laws granting married women control of their property, Laura Clay and the Kentucky Equal Rights Association began searching for sympathizers who might circulate petitions for presentation to the General Assembly. As the wife of a college president, Lida offered an enlightened prospect, but her initial response was tentative. Behind

her pleas to be excused due to ill health and domestic duties, she later admitted, was nervousness over public disapproval of such “unwomanly” activism. And Bowling Green’s attorneys, accustomed to helping wealthy women circumvent the law by placing their assets in premarital trusts, dismissed the unchivalrous notion that any woman’s property rights were less well protected than a man’s.

But Lida and a friend did indeed circulate a petition, and in the process learned of the law’s disastrous consequences for ordinary women. During these over-the-backfence encounters, she heard unforgettable stories: of the deserted wife whose husband surfaced just in time to appropriate her small earnings; of the dying woman unable to bequeath what few valuables she possessed to her children; and of the bride who invested her savings in a home, only to see two-thirds of its sale price paid to her husband’s family upon his death. Once again, it would be left to Sally Ann to demonstrate how such tawdry marital secrets were, in fact, a common source of resentment among women. “Where’s that money ’Lizabeth had when she married you?” she demands of the farmer who had withheld travel funds from his wife. “Down in that ten-acre medder lot, ain’t it?—and in that new barn you built last spring.” Turning to the old deacon who had warned her to keep silent, Sally Ann neatly punctures his claim to rank among God’s elect by revealing what



Well studied in history, literature and the Bible, Lida was also a devoted reader of (and contributor to) the pro-suffrage Woman’s Journal.

she knows about his wife's meager wardrobe. "Lord," she asks, "how high can a man's prayers rise toward heaven when his wife ain't got but one flannel skirt to her name? No higher than the back of his pew, if you'll let me tell it."

Though Lida was outraged by the tales she heard, it was the force of the printed word that motivated her to take up her pen on behalf of legal equity and the vote. Among the publications that Laura Clay and other advocates relied upon to educate their housebound sisters across Kentucky was the *Woman's Journal*, a Boston-based weekly "devoted to the Interests of Woman—to her Educational, Industrial, Legal and Political Equality, and especially to her Right of Suffrage." After sampling its news, editorials, and reports from suffrage associations around the country and the world, Lida readily embraced every aspect of the cause. "I knew just where I stood," she later remembered—not just on the repeal of married women's property laws in Kentucky but on a full reform agenda culminating in the vote for all women.

After ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, which gave women the vote, she admitted to a colleague, "I believe I enjoy a fight more than the victory that ends the fight."

As the ingredients for "Sally Ann's Experience" began to gather in her creative mind, Lida composed a powerful manifesto that electrified the delegates to the 1892 convention of the Kentucky Equal Rights Association. In "Why Democratic Women Want the Ballot," she brushed aside all of the ancient arguments for denying women the vote, particularly the contention that politics was a "cesspool" into which such delicate creatures should not be cast. Shielding women from the vote because they were "goddesses" and "queens" was hardly consistent with some of the less-than-royal treatment Lida had seen meted out to members of her sex. She even disputed the notion that women should seek the vote not as an end in itself but as the mere means of accomplishing a variety of "civic house-cleaning" tasks such as prohibition, prison

improvements, and better schools. "If every reform advocated by every party could be carried into effect tomorrow, I would still be a woman suffragist," she warned.

Simply put, Lida wrote, the ballot belonged to her and to all women as a matter of justice. Whatever label she gave herself—taxpayer, citizen, or human being—returned her to this same truth. As such, the vote was neither for men to withhold, nor for women to earn. In fact, though her essay was adamant and closely argued, Lida was careful to preface it with the disclaimer that "as a woman, and a Kentucky woman, it seems to me an impertinence for any man to require me to give a reason for wanting the ballot."

BEFORE long, Lida's writing in support of suffrage was appearing not only in newspapers across Kentucky but in the *Woman's Journal* and other national periodicals such as the independent *Kate Field's Washington* and the *Woman's Tribune*, a favorite of Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. In Lida's home

state, the call to enfranchise women fell on deaf ears, but in 1894 the lobbying efforts of Laura Clay and the Kentucky Equal Rights Association bore fruit when the General Assembly finally eliminated most of the legal disabilities affecting married women. Though her husband's consent was still required to sell any land she owned, a Kentucky wife was given full control of her wages, personal belongings, rents, and contractual rights, and gained the power to dispose of her property by will.

Then, in 1898, came "Sally Ann's Experience"—by the admission of its author, just a "plain tale of plain people" burdened with the injustices of marital property laws that were by then no longer in effect. Why did it draw such cheers of appreciation from the public? And why, despite making no mention of the issue of

votes for women, was it printed four times in the *Woman's Journal* and, indeed, advertised as a "suffrage story"?

Lida herself answered the first question. When the *Cosmopolitan* reprinted "Sally Ann" on the tenth anniversary of its original publication, it included an essay by Eliza Calvert Hall explaining its origin and popularity. Despite the welcome repeal of a host of "barbaric" property laws, Lida observed that "Sally Ann" continued to represent "in some degree the experience of nearly every married woman" who found herself unappreciated, uncompensated for her domestic labor, and beholden to her husband for spending money. Lida proved her point by quoting from her fan mail, particularly the touching letters from widowers who had realized only too late how much their wives' toil had accounted for their comfort and happiness. No less an admirer than President Theodore Roosevelt understood, too, that errant husbands might redeem themselves through the gospel according to Sally Ann. Before a large audience in Michigan, Roosevelt recommended that the story be used "as a tract in all families where the men folks tend to selfish or thoughtless or overbearing disregard of the rights of their womenkind."

"Sally Ann's Experience" concludes on a happy note. The next spring, all the wives appear in new clothes, evidence that the men of Goshen have taken Sally Ann's words to heart and pried open their wallets. In telling this nostalgic tale of how one woman brought change to a small community, however, Lida also pointed the way for the suffragists of her own generation in their quest for the vote.

Sally Ann's challenge, after all, mirrors their own. When she rises to address the congregation, she faces smug, condescending men, their attitudes reinforced by centuries of legal authority and social custom. Women's rights supporters, of course, had never tired of pointing out the hypocrisy in male logic and laws, and like Sally Ann they enjoyed lacing their commentaries with sarcasm. When a Kentucky Colonel once protested that his wife would be too busy attending to their three children to cast a ballot, Lida (though always sympathetic to the trials of motherhood) exclaimed that his children "must be 'holy terrors' if their poor

mother can't find time to walk down the street and vote." Responding to men's hand-wringing over the possibility that a college education would disabuse women of their "ideals" of marriage and motherhood, she wondered why men's colleges did not fret over future husbands and fathers who developed an "unmanly hankering after eminence in law, medicine, or literature." Meanwhile, "one would think that woman's ideals had been created by the Almighty and then left lying around loose, and that man was made for the purpose of gathering up these fragile things and shielding them from the rough clutches of Vassar, Wellesley, and Bryn Mawr students."

In presenting her "experience," Sally Ann also confronts another roadblock familiar to woman suffragists—namely, women themselves, who were often too timid, poorly educated, and socially isolated to be mobilized on behalf of change. Most reformers acknowledged that this passivity was understandable, given women's history of oppression; nevertheless, neither Lida nor Sally Ann excused their sisters from all responsibility for their plight. Lida was fond of quoting a character in one of George Eliot's novels—"I'm not denyin' the women are foolish: God Almighty made 'em to match the men"—and in composing Sally Ann's speech she offered an assessment that was only a little more charitable. Between finger-wagging husbands and the Apostle Paul, observes Sally Ann, her friends have simply "lost all the gumption and grit that the Lord started them out with."

And Sally Ann, of course, shows them how to recover it. With her inborn self-respect and uncompromising love of justice, she is Lida's model of the visionary reformer who has "sense enough to know what rights women ought to have and courage enough to demand those rights." In a dramatic scene, Sally Ann rallies the other women to recognize their collective power and moral authority. They gather around and tearfully embrace the wife who had taken the church's money. Meanwhile, the parson, who has attempted to distract the congregation from Sally Ann's tirade by singing a hymn, loses control of his flock halfway through the opening verse.



After her husband's death in 1916, Lida moved to Dallas, Texas, where she could be nearer her children (including Cecilia, at right) and indulge her love of gardening. She died in 1935 at age 79.

THOUGH she creates an uproar in the church, Sally Ann is hardly disrespectful of Christian teaching. On the contrary, Lida has her heroine employ the lessons of the Bible to women's advantage. Like Laura Clay and other Southern suffragists, Lida was steeped in knowledge of scripture. She had studied the Bible at school in Ohio, and was the granddaughter of one of Bowling Green's first and most respected Presbyterian ministers. Even as she challenged passages commonly used to bolster the clerical community's negative opinions of women, Lida did not hesitate to preach those portions of the Bible that favored political and social equality of the sexes—the accounts of influential female preachers, for example, or the alternative creation story in which male and female were brought forth simultaneously, rather than one from the other.

Accordingly, Sally Ann's most compelling experience comes from her own, untutored reading of the Bible, specifically a passage from the Book of Ephesians that she has found conveniently omitted from most male sermonizing. Striding directly to the pulpit, she reminds the assembly of that other command of Paul's: "about men lovin' their wives as Christ loved the church, and as they loved their own bodies." No time need be wasted "reconcilin'" the apparent contradictions in the Apostle's admonitions. When he told women to be silent and "subject to their husbands in everything," Sally Ann declares simply, "he wasn't inspired." But when he told husbands to love their wives, "he was inspired."

Throughout her life Lida herself remained inspired, intellectually and creatively, by the suffrage struggle. After ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment (which

gave women the vote) in 1920, and after the National American Woman Suffrage Association had honored her with a Distinguished Service Certificate, she admitted to a colleague, "I believe I enjoy a fight more than the victory that ends the fight." When not composing and circulating material directly in support of the cause, Lida had kept up her fiction writing about ordinary women whose character, wisdom, and aspirations only compounded the injustice of their disfranchisement—the farm wives who overcame household scarcity by piecing beautiful patchwork quilts; the mothers who coped bravely with advancing age and the persistent call of duty to others; and the women who sought and achieved some small economic or spiritual victory despite the selfish antics of their menfolk. The estimated one million readers Eliza Calvert Hall reached before her death in 1935 found that her message consistently charmed even as it instructed, and left both men and women lighthearted even as they pondered some plain truths about marriage, money, and the imbalance of power between the sexes.

And the key to it all was Sally Ann, the woman who spoke up most memorably for the experience of her creator, a Kentucky author determined to tell stories and a Kentucky woman determined to bring about change.

"You set right down and hear what I've got to say?" ●

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All images courtesy of the Kentucky Library and Museum, Western Kentucky University

This short story, which caused a sensation in 1898, left no doubt about where Kentucky author Eliza Calvert Hall stood on the question of women's rights.

Sally Ann's Experience

"COME right in and set down. I was jest wishin' I had somebody to talk to. Take that chair right by the door so's you can get the breeze." And Aunt Jane beamed at me over her silver-rimmed spectacles and hitched her own chair a little to one side, in order to give me the full benefit of the wind that was blowing softly through the white-curtained window, and carrying into the room the heavenliest odors from a field of clover that lay in full bloom just across the road. For it was June in Kentucky, and clover and blue-grass were running sweet riot over the face of the earth.

Aunt Jane and her room together always carried me back to a dead and gone generation. There was a rag carpet on the floor, of the "hit-or-miss" pattern; the chairs were ancient Shaker rockers, some with homely "shuck" bottoms, and each had a tidy of snowy thread or crochet cotton fastened primly over the back. The high bed and bureau and a shining mahogany table suggested an era of "plain living" far, far remote from the day of Turkish rugs and Japanese bric-a-brac, and Aunt Jane was in perfect correspondence with her environment. She wore a purple calico dress, rather short and scant; a gingham apron, with a capacious pocket, in which she always carried knitting or some other "handy work"; a white handkerchief was laid primly around the wrinkled throat and fastened with a pin containing a lock of gray hair; her cap was of black lace and lutestring ribbon, not one of the butterfly affairs that perch on the top of the puffs and frizzes of the modern old lady, but a substantial structure that covered her whole head and was tied securely under her chin. She talked in a sweet old treble with a little lisp, caused by the absence of teeth, and her laugh was as clear and joyous as a young girl's.

"Yes, I'm a-piecin' quilts again," she said, snipping away at the bits of calico in her lap. "I did say I was done with that sort o' work; but this mornin' I was rummagin' around up in the garret, and I come across this bundle of pieces, and thinks I, 'I reckon it's intended for me to piece one more quilt before I die'; I must 'a' put 'em there thirty years ago and clean forgot 'em, and I've been settin' here all the evenin' cuttin' 'em and thinkin' about old times.



Courtesy of the Kentucky Library and Museum, Western Kentucky University

"Sally Ann's Experience" in the July, 1898 *Cosmopolitan* featured this illustration, by well-known artist Peter Newell, of Sally Ann's dramatic confrontation with the men of Goshen Church.

"Jest feel o' that," she continued, tossing some scraps into my lap. "There ain't any such caliker nowadays. This ain't your five-cent stuff that fades in the first washin' and wears out in the second. A caliker dress was somethin' worth buyin' and worth makin' up in them days. That blue-flowered piece was a dress I

got the spring before Abram died. When I put on mournin' it was as good as new, and I give it to sister Mary. That one with the green ground and white figger was my niece Rebecca's. She wore it for the first time to the County Fair the year I took the premium on my salt-risin' bread and sponge cake. This black-an'-white piece Sally Ann Flint give me. I ricollect 'twas in blackberry time, and I'd been out in the big pasture pickin' some for supper, and I stopped in at Sally Ann's for a drink o' water on my way back. She was cuttin' out this dress."

Aunt Jane broke off with a little soprano laugh.

"Did I ever tell you about Sally Ann's experience?" she said, as she laid two three-cornered pieces together and began to sew with her slender, nervous old fingers.

To find Aunt Jane alone and in a reminiscent mood! This was delightful.

"Do tell me," I said.

Aunt Jane was silent for a few moments. She always made this pause before beginning a story, and there was something impressive about it. I used to think she was making an invocation to the goddess of Memory.

"'Twas forty years ago," she began musingly, "and the way of it was this. Our church was considerably out o' fix. It needed a new roof. Some o' the winder lights was out, and the floor was as bare as your hand, and always had been. The men folks managed to git the roof shingled and the winders fixed, and us women in the Mite Society concluded we'd git a cyarpet. We'd been savin' up our money for some time, and we had about twelve dollars. I ricollect what a argument we had, for some of us wanted the cyarpet, and some wanted to give it to furrin missions, as we'd set out to do at first. Sally Ann was the one that settled it. She says at last—Sally Ann was in favor of the cyarpet—she says, 'Well, if any of the heathen fails to hear the gospel on account of our gittin' this cyarpet, they'll be saved anyhow, so Parson Page says. And if we send the money and they do hear the gospel, like as not they won't repent, and then they're certain to be damned. And it seems to me as long as we ain't sure what they'll do, we might as well keep the money and git the cyarpet. I never did see much sense anyhow,' says she, 'in givin' people a chance to damn theirselves.'

"Well, we decided to take Sally Ann's advice, and we was talkin' about app'intin' a committee to go to town the follerin' Monday and pick out the cyarpet, when all at once 'Lizabeth Taylor—she was our treasurer—she spoke up, and says she, 'There ain't any use app'intin' that committee. The money's gone,' she says, sort o' short and quick. 'I kept it in my top bureau drawer, and when I went for it yesterday, it was gone. I'll pay it back if I'm ever able, but I ain't able now.' And with that she got up and walked out o' the room, before any one could say a word, and we seen her goin' down the road lookin' straight before her and walkin' right fast.

"And we—we set there and stared at each other in a sort o' dazed way. I could see that everybody was thinkin' the same

thing, but nobody said a word, till our minister's wife—she was as good a woman as ever lived—she says, '*Judge not.*'

"Them two words was jest like a sermon to us. Then Sally Ann spoke up and says: 'For the Lord's sake, don't let the men folks know anything about this. They're always sayin' that women ain't fit to handle money, and I for one don't want to give 'em any more ground to stand on than they've already got.'

"So we agreed to say nothin' about it, and all of us kept our promise except Milly Amos. She had mighty little sense to begin

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with, and havin' been married only about two months, she'd about lost that little. So next mornin' I happened to meet Sam Amos, and he says to me, 'Aunt Jane, how much money have you women got to'rds the new cyarpet for the church?' I looked him square in the face, and I says, 'Are you a member of the Ladies' Mite Society of Goshen church, Sam Amos? For if you are, you already know how much money we've got, and if you ain't, you've got no business knowin'. And, furthermore,' says I, 'there's some women that can't keep a secret and a promise, and some that can, and I can.' And that settled *him*.

"Well, 'Lizabeth never showed her face outside her door for more'n a month afterwards, and a more pitiful-lookin' creatur' you never saw than she was when she come out to prayer-meetin' the night Sally Ann give her experience. She set 'way back in the church, and she was as pale and peaked as if she had been through a siege of typhoid. I ricollect it all as if it had been yesterday. We sung 'Sweet Hour of Prayer,' and Parson Page prayed, and then called on the brethren to say anything they might feel called on to say concernin' their experience in the past week. Old Uncle Jim Matthews begun to clear his throat, and I knew, as well as I knew my name, he was fixin' to git up and tell how precious the Lord had been to his soul, jest like he'd been doin' every Wednesday night for twenty years. But before he got started, here come 'Lizabeth walkin' down the side aisle and stopped right in front o' the pulpit.

"I've somethin' to say,' she says. 'It's been on my mind till I can't stand it any longer. I've got to tell it, or I'll go crazy. It was me that took that cyarpet money. I only meant to borrow it. I thought sure I'd be able to pay it back before it was wanted. But things went wrong, and I ain't known a peaceful minute since, and never shall again, I reckon. I took it to pay my way up to Louisville, the time I got the news that Mary was dyin'.'

"Mary was her daughter by her first husband, you see. 'I begged Jacob to give me the money to go on,' says she, 'and he wouldn't do it. I tried to give up and stay, but I jest couldn't.

Mary was all I had in the world; and maybe you that has children can put yourself in my place, and know what it would be to hear your only child callin' to you from her death-bed, and you not able to go to her. I asked Jacob three times for the money,' she says, 'and when I found he wouldn't give it to me, I said to myself, "I'm goin' anyhow." I got down on my knees,' says she, 'and asked the Lord to show me a way, and I felt sure he would. As soon as Jacob had eat his breakfast and gone out on the farm, I dressed myself, and as I opened the top bureau drawer to get out my best collar, I saw the missionary money. It come right into

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my head,' says she, 'that maybe this was the answer to my prayer; maybe I could borrow this money, and pay it back some way or other before it was called for. I tried to put it out o' my head, but the thought kept comin' back; and when I went down into the sittin'-room to get Jacob's cyarpetbag to carry a few things in, I happened to look up at the mantelpiece and saw the brass candlesticks with prisms all 'round 'em that used to belong to my mother; and all at once I seemed to see jest what the Lord intended for me to do.

"You know,' she says, 'I had a boarder summer before last—that lady from Louisville—and she wanted them candlesticks the worst kind, and offered me fifteen dollars for 'em. I wouldn't part with 'em then, but she said if ever I wanted to sell 'em, to let her know, and she left her name and address on a cyard. I went to the big Bible and got out the cyard, and I packed the candlesticks in the cyarpetbag, and put on my bonnet. When I opened the door I looked up the road, and the first thing I saw was Dave Crawford comin' along in his new buggy. I went out to the gate, and he drew up and asked me if I was goin' to town, and said he'd take me. It looked like the Lord was leadin' me all the time,' says she, 'but the way things turned out it must 'a' been Satan. I got to Mary just two hours before she died, and she looked up in my face and says, "Mother, I knew God wouldn't let me die till I'd seen you once more."

Here Aunt Jane took off her glasses and wiped her eyes.

"I can't tell this without cryin' to save my life," said she; "but 'Lizabeth never shed a tear. She looked like she'd got past cryin', and she talked straight on as if she'd made up her mind to say jest so much, and she'd die if she didn't git to say it.

"As soon as the funeral was over,' says she, 'I set out to find the lady that wanted the candlesticks. She wasn't at home, but her niece was there, and said she'd heard her aunt speak of the candlesticks often; and she'd be home in a few days and would send me the money right off. I come home thinkin' it was all right, and I kept expectin' the money every day, but it never come till day before yesterday. I wrote three times about it, but I never got a word from her till Monday. She had just got home, she said, and hoped I hadn't been inconvenienced by the delay. She wrote a nice, polite letter and sent me a cheek for fifteen dollars, and here it is. I wanted to confess it all that day at the Mite Society, but somehow I couldn't till I had the money right in my hand to pay back. If the lady had only come back when her niece said she was comin', it would all have turned out right, but I reckon it's a judgment on me for meddling with the Lord's money. God only knows what I've suffered,' says she, 'but if I had to do it over again, I believe I'd do it. Mary was all the child I had in the world, and I had to see her once more before she died. I've been a member of this church for twenty years,' says she, 'but I reckon you'll have to turn me out now.

"The pore thing stood there tremblin' and holdin' out the check as if she expected somebody to come and take it. Old Silas Petty was glowerin' at her from under his eyebrows, and it put me in mind of the Pharisees and the woman they wanted to stone, and I ricollect thinkin', 'Oh, if the Lord Jesus would jest come in and take her part!' And while we all set there like a passel o' mutes, Sally Ann got up and marched down the middle aisle and stood right by 'Lizabeth. You know what funny thoughts people will have sometimes.

"Well, I felt so relieved. It popped into my head all at once that we didn't need the Lord after all, Sally Ann would do jest as well. It seemed sort o' like sacrilege, but I couldn't help it.

"Well, Sally Ann looked all around as composed as you please, and says she, 'I reckon if anybody's turned out o' this church on account o' that miserable little money, it'll be Jacob and not 'Lizabeth. A man that won't give his wife money to go to her dyin' child is too mean to stay in a Christian church anyhow; and I'd like to know how it is that a woman, that had eight hundred dollars when she married, has to go to her husband and git down on her knees and beg for what's her own. Where's that money 'Lizabeth had when she married you?' says she, turnin' round and lookin' Jacob in the face. 'Down in that ten-acre medder lot, ain't it?—and in that new barn you built last spring. A pretty elder you are, ain't you? Elders don't seem to have improved much since Susannah's times. If there ain't one sort o' meanness in em it's another,' says she.

"Goodness knows what she would 'a' said, but jest here old Deacon Petty rose up. And says he, 'Brethren,'—and he spread his arms out and waved 'em up and down like he was goin' to pray,—'brethren, this is awful! If this woman wants to give her religious experience, why,' says he, very kind and condescendin', 'of course she can do so. But when it comes to a woman standin' up in the house of the Lord and revilin' an elder as this woman is doin', why, I tremble,' says he, 'for the church of Christ. For don't the Apostle Paul say, "Let your women keep silence in the church"?"

“As soon as he named the ’Postle Paul, Sally Ann give a kind of snort. Sally Ann was terrible free-spoken. And when Deacon Petty said that, she jest squared herself like she intended to stand there till judgment day, and says she, ‘The ’Postle Paul has been dead ruther too long for me to be afraid of him. And I never heard of him app’intin’ Deacon Petty to represent him in this church. If the ’Postle Paul don’t like what I’m sayin’, let him rise up from his grave in Corinthians or Ephesians, or wherever he’s buried, and say so. I’ve got a message from the Lord to the men folks of this church, and I’m goin’ to deliver it, Paul or no Paul,’ says she. ‘And as for you, Silas Petty, I ain’t forgot the time I dropped in to see Maria one Saturday night and found her washin’ out her flannel petticoat and dryin’ it before the fire. And every time I’ve had to hear you lead in prayer since then I’ve said to myself, “Lord, how high can a man’s prayers rise toward heaven when his wife ain’t got but one flannel skirt to her name? No higher than the back of his pew, if you’ll let me tell it.” I knew jest how it was,’ said Sally Ann, ‘as well as if Maria’d told me. She’d been havin’ the milk and butter money from the old roan cow she’d raised from a little heifer, and jest because feed was scarce, you’d sold her off before Maria had money enough to buy her winter flannels. I can give my experience, can I? Well, that’s jest what I’m a-doin’,’ says she; ‘and while I’m about it,’ says she, ‘I’ll give in some experience for ’Lizabeth and Maria and the rest of the women who, betwixt their husbands an’ the ’Postle Paul, have about lost all the gumption and grit that the Lord started them out with. If the ’Postle Paul,’ says she, ‘has got anything to say about a woman workin’ like a slave for twenty-five years and then havin’ to set up an’ wash out her clothes Saturday night, so’s she can go to church clean Sunday mornin’, I’d like to hear it. But don’t you dare to say anything to me about keepin’ silence in the church. There was times when Paul says he didn’t know whether he had the Spirit of God or not, and I’m certain that when he wrote that text he wasn’t any more inspired than you are, Silas Petty, when you tell Maria to shut her mouth.’

“Job Taylor was settin’ right in front of Deacon Petty, and I reckon he thought his time was comin’ next; so he gets up, easy-like, with his red bandanna to his mouth, and starts out. But Sally Ann headed him off before he’d gone six steps, and says she, ‘There ain’t anything the matter with you, Job Taylor; you set right down and hear what I’ve got to say. I’ve knelt and stood through enough o’ your long-winded prayers, and now it’s my time to talk and yours to listen.’

“And bless your life, if Job didn’t set down as meek as Moses, and Sally Ann lit right into him. And says she, ‘I reckon you’re afraid I’ll tell some o’ your meanness, ain’t you? And the only thing that stands in my way is that there’s so much to tell I don’t know where to begin. There ain’t a woman in this church,’ says she, ‘that don’t know how Marthy scrimped and worked and saved to buy her a new set o’ furniture, and how you took the money with you when you went to Cincinnati, the spring before

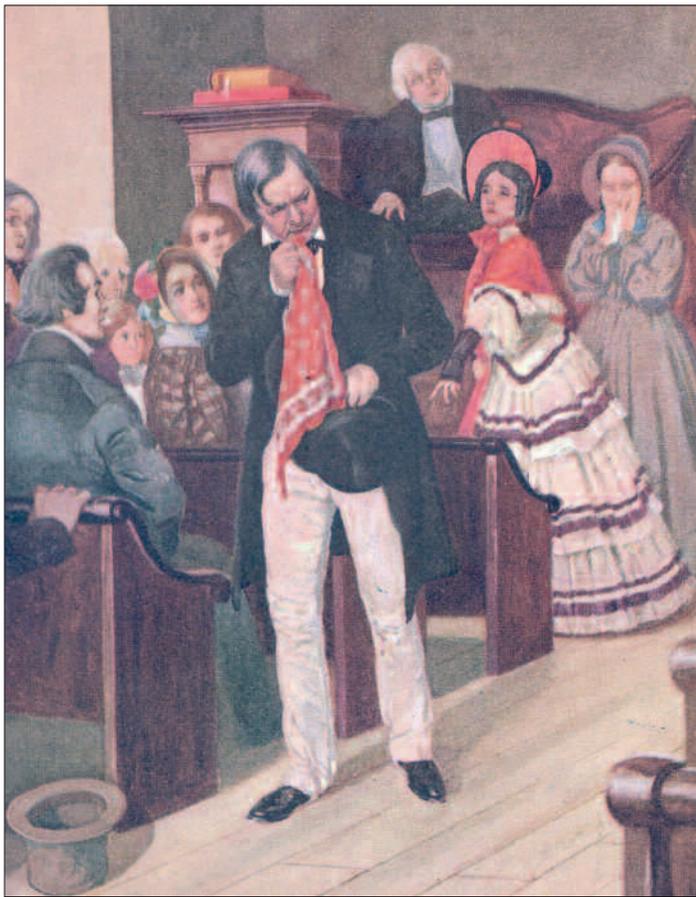
she died, and come back without the furniture. And when she asked you for the money, you told her that she and everything she had belonged to you, and that your mother’s old furniture was good enough for anybody. It’s my belief,’ says she, ‘that’s what killed Marthy. Women are dyin’ every day, and the doctors will tell you it’s some new-fangled disease or other, when, if the truth was known, it’s nothin’ but wantin’ somethin’ they can’t git, and hopin’ and waitin’ for somethin’ that never comes. I’ve watched ’em, and I know. The night before Marthy died she says to me, “Sally Ann,” says she, “I could die a heap peacefuler if I jest knew the front room was fixed up right with a new set of furniture for the funeral.”’ And Sally Ann pointed her finger right at Job and says she, ‘I said it then, and I say it now to your face, Job Taylor, you killed Marthy the same as if you’d taken her by the throat and choked the life out of her.’

“Mary Embry, Job’s sister-in-law, was settin’ right behind me, and I heard her say, ‘Amen!’ as fervent as if somebody had been prayin’. Job set there, lookin’ like a sheep-killin’ dog, and Sally Ann went right on. ‘I know,’ says she, ‘the law gives you the right to your wives earnin’s and everything they’ve got, down to the clothes on their backs; and I’ve always said there was some Kentucky law that was made for the express purpose of encouragin’ men in their natural meanness,—a p’int in which the Lord knows they don’t need no encouragin’. There’s some men,’ says she, ‘that’ll sneak behind the ’Postle Paul when they’re plannin’ any meanness against their wives, and some that runs to the law, and you’re one of the law kind. But mark my words,’ says she,

“Sally Ann heard the shufflin’, and as soon as she got through with Job, she turned around to Dave, and says she: ‘Do you think your hemmin’ and scrapin’ is goin’ to stop me, Dave Crawford? You’re one o’ the men that makes me think that it’s better to be a Kentucky horse than a Kentucky woman.’”

‘one of these days, you men who’ve been stealin’ your wives’ property and defraudin’ ’em, and cheatin’ ’em out o’ their just dues, you’ll have to stand before a Judge that cares mighty little for Kentucky law; and all the law and all the Scripture you can bring up won’t save you from goin’ where the rich man went.’

“I can see Sally Ann right now,” and Aunt Jane pushed her glasses up on her forehead, and looked with a dreamy, retrospective gaze through the doorway and beyond, where swaying elms and maples were whispering softly to each other as the breeze touched them. “She had on her old black poke-bonnet and some black yarn mitts, and she didn’t come nigh up to Job’s shoulder, but Job set and listened as if he jest had to. I heard Dave Crawford shufflin’ his feet and clearin’ his throat while Sally Ann was talkin’ to Job. Dave’s farm j’ined Sally Ann’s, and they had a law-suit once about the way a fence ought to run, and Sally Ann beat



Courtesy of the Kentucky Library and Museum, Western Kentucky University

“Sally Ann’s Experience” was reissued in book form in 1910, complete with artist G. Patrick Nelson’s more genteel conception of Sally Ann.

him. He always despised Sally Ann after that, and used to call her a ‘he-woman.’ Sally Ann heard the shufflin’, and as soon as she got through with Job, she turned around to Dave, and says she: ‘Do you think your hemmin’ and scrapin’ is goin’ to stop me, Dave Crawford? You’re one o’ the men that makes me think that it’s better to be a Kentucky horse than a Kentucky woman. Many’s the time,’ says she, ‘I’ve seen pore July with her head tied up, crawlin’ around tryin’ to cook for sixteen harvest hands, and you out in the stable cossetin’ up a sick mare, and rubbin’ down your three-year-olds to get ‘em in trim for the fair. Of all the things that’s hard to understand,’ says she, ‘the hardest is a man that has more mercy on his horse than he has on his wife. July’s found rest at last,’ says she, ‘out in the graveyard; and every time I pass your house I thank the Lord that you’ve got to pay a good price for your cookin’ now, as there ain’t a woman in the country fool enough to step into July’s shoes.’

“But, la!” said Aunt Jane, breaking off with her happy laugh,—the laugh of one who revels in rich memories,—“what’s the use of me tellin’ all this stuff? The long and the short of it is, that Sally Ann had her say about nearly every man in the church. She told how Mary Embry had to cut up her weddin’ skirts to make clothes for her first baby; and how John Martin stopped Hannah one day when she was carryin’ her mother a pound of butter, and made her go back and put the butter down in the cellar; and how Lije Davison used to make Ann pay him for every bit of chicken feed, and then take half the egg money because the chickens got into his gar-

den; and how Abner Page give his wife twenty-five cents for spendin’ money the time she went to visit her sister.

“Sally Ann always was a masterful sort of woman, and that night it seemed like she was possessed. The way she talked made me think of the Day of Pentecost and the gift of tongues. And finally she got to the minister! I’d been wonderin’ all along if she was goin’ to let him off. She turned around to where he was settin’ under the pulpit, and says she, ‘Brother Page, you’re a good man, but you ain’t so good you couldn’t be better. It was jest last week,’ says she, ‘that the women come around beggin’ money to buy you a new suit of clothes to go to Presbytery in; and I told ‘em if it was to get Mis’ Page a new dress, I was ready to give; but not a dime was I goin’ to give towards puttin’ finery on a man’s back. I’m tired o’ seein’ the ministers walk up into the pulpit in their slick black broadcloths, and their wives settin’ down in the pew in an old black silk that’s been turned upside down, wrong side out, and hind part before, and sponged, and pressed, and made over till you can’t tell whether it’s silk, or caliker, or what.’

“Well, I reckon there was some o’ the women that expected the roof to fall down on us when Sally Ann said that right to the minister. But it didn’t fall, and Sally Ann went straight on. ‘And when it comes to the perseverance of the saints and the decrees of God,’ says she, ‘there ain’t many can preach a better sermon; but there’s some of your sermons,’ says she, ‘that ain’t fit for much but kindlin’ fires. There’s that one you preached last Sunday on the twenty-fourth verse of the fifth chapter of Ephesians. I reckon I’ve heard about a hundred and fifty sermons on that text, and I reckon I’ll keep on hearin’ ‘em as long as there ain’t anybody but men to do the preachin’. Anybody would think,’ says she, ‘that you preachers was struck blind every time you git through with the twenty-fourth verse, for I never heard a sermon on the twenty-fifth verse. I believe there’s men in this church that thinks the fifth chapter of Ephesians hasn’t got but twenty-four verses, and I’m goin’ to read the rest of it to ‘em for once anyhow.’

“And if Sally Ann didn’t walk right up into the pulpit same as if she’d been ordained, and read what Paul said about men lovin’ their wives as Christ loved the church, and as they loved their own bodies.

“Now,’ says she, ‘if Brother Page can reconcile these texts with what Paul says about women submittin’ and bein’ subject, he’s welcome to do it. But,’ says she, ‘if I had the preachin’ to do, I wouldn’t waste time reconcilin’. I’d jest say that when Paul told women to be subject to their husbands in everything, he wasn’t inspired; and when he told men to love their wives as their own bodies, he was inspired; and I’d like to see the Presbytery that could silence me from preachin’ as long as I wanted to preach. As for turnin’ out o’ the church,’ says she, ‘I’d like to know who’s to do the turnin’ out. When the disciples brought that woman to Christ there wasn’t a man in the crowd fit to cast a stone at her; and if there’s any man nowadays good enough to set in judgment on a woman, his name ain’t on the rolls of Goshen church. If ‘Lizabeth,’ says she, ‘had as much common sense as she’s got conscience, she’d know that the matter o’ that money didn’t concern nobody but our Mite Society, and we women can settle it without any help from you deacons and elders.’

“Well, I reckon Parson Page thought if he didn’t head Sally Ann off some way or other she’d go on all night; so when she kind o’ stopped for breath and shut up the big Bible, he grabbed a hymn-book and says:

“Let us sing ‘Blest be the Tie that Binds.’”

“He struck up the tune himself; and about the middle of the first verse Mis’ Page got up and went over to where ’Lizabeth was standin’, and give her the right hand of fellowship, and then Mis’ Petty did the same; and first thing we knew we was all around her shakin’ hands and huggin’ her and cryin’ over her. ’Twas a reg’lar love-feast; and we went home feelin’ like we’d been through a big protracted meetin’ and got religion over again.

“’Twasn’t more’n a week till ’Lizabeth was down with slow fever—nervous collapse, old Dr. Pendleton called it. We took turns nursin’ her, and one day she looked up in my face and says, ‘Jane, I know now what the mercy of the Lord is.’”

Here Aunt Jane paused, and began to cut three-cornered pieces out of a time-stained square of flowered chintz. The quilt was to be of the wild-goose pattern. There was a drowsy hum from the beehive near the window, and the shadows were lengthening as sunset approached.

“One queer thing about it,” she resumed, “was that while Sally Ann was talkin’, not one of us felt like laughin’. We set there as solemn as if parson was preachin’ to us on ’lection and predestination.

But whenever I think about it now, I laugh fit to kill. And I’ve thought many a time that Sally Ann’s plain talk to them men done more good than all the sermons us women had had preached to us about bein’ ‘shamefaced’ and ‘submittin’ ourselves to our husbands, for

every one o’ them women come out in new clothes that spring, and such a change as it made in some of ’em! I wouldn’t be surprised if she did have a message to deliver, jest as she said. The Bible says an ass spoke up once and reprov’d a man, and I reckon if an ass can reprove a man, so can a woman. And it looks to me like men stand in need of reprovin’ now as much as they did in Balaam’s days.

“Jacob died the follerin’ fall, and ’Lizabeth got shed of her troubles. The triflin’ scamp never married her for anything but her money.

“Things is different from what they used to be,” she went on, as she folded her pieces into a compact bundle and tied it with a piece of gray yarn. “My son-in-law was tellin’ me last summer how a passel o’ women kept goin’ up to Frankfort and so pesterin’ the Legislatur’, that they had to change the laws to get rid of ’em. So married women now has all the property rights they want, and more’n some of ’em has sense to use, I reckon.”

“How about you and Uncle Abram?” I suggested. “Didn’t Sally Ann say anything about you in her experience?”

Aunt Jane’s black eyes snapped with some of the fire of her long-past youth. “La! no, child,” she said. “Abram never was that kind of a man, and I never was that kind of a woman. I ricollect

as we was walkin’ home that night Abram says, sort o’ humble-like: ‘Jane, hadn’t you better git that brown merino you was lookin’ at last County Court day?’

“And I says, ‘Don’t you worry about that brown merino, Abram. It’s a-lyin’ in my bottom drawer right now. I told the storekeeper to cut it off jest as soon as your back was turned, and Mis’ Simpson is goin’ to make it next week.’ And Abram he jest laughed, and says, ‘Well, Jane, I never saw your beat.’ You see, I never was any hand at ‘submittin’ myself to my husband, like some women. I’ve often wondered if Abram wouldn’t ’a’ been jest like Silas Petty if I’d been like Maria. I’ve noticed that whenever a woman’s willin’ to be imposed upon, there’s always a man standin’ ’round ready to do the imposin’. I never went to a law-book to find out what my rights was. I did my duty faithful to Abram, and when I wanted anything I went and got it, and Abram paid for it, and I can’t see but what we got on jest as well as we’d ’a’ done if I’d ’a’ ‘submitted’ myself.”

Longer and longer grew the shadows, and the faint tinkle of bells came in through the windows. The cows were beginning to come home. The spell of Aunt Jane’s dramatic art was upon me. I began to feel that my own personality had somehow slipped away from me, and those dead people, evoked from their graves by an old woman’s histrionism, seemed more real to me than my living, breathing self.

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“There now, I’ve talked you clean to death,” she said with a happy laugh, as I rose to go. “But we’ve had a real nice time, and I’m glad you come.”

The sun was almost down as I walked slowly away. When I looked back, at the turn of the road, Aunt Jane was standing on the doorstep, shading her eyes and peering across the level fields. I knew what it meant. Beyond the fields was a bit of woodland, and in one corner of that you might, if your eyesight was good, discern here and there a glimpse of white. It was the old burying-ground of Goshen church; and I knew by the strained attitude and intent gaze of the watcher in the door that somewhere in the sunlit space between Aunt Jane’s doorstep and the little country graveyard, the souls of the living and the dead were keeping a silent tryst. ●

Don Ament really likes trees. They are at the core of his photography, which reflects a deep concern for 'this large, round Earth ... a planet we have forgotten how to care for.'



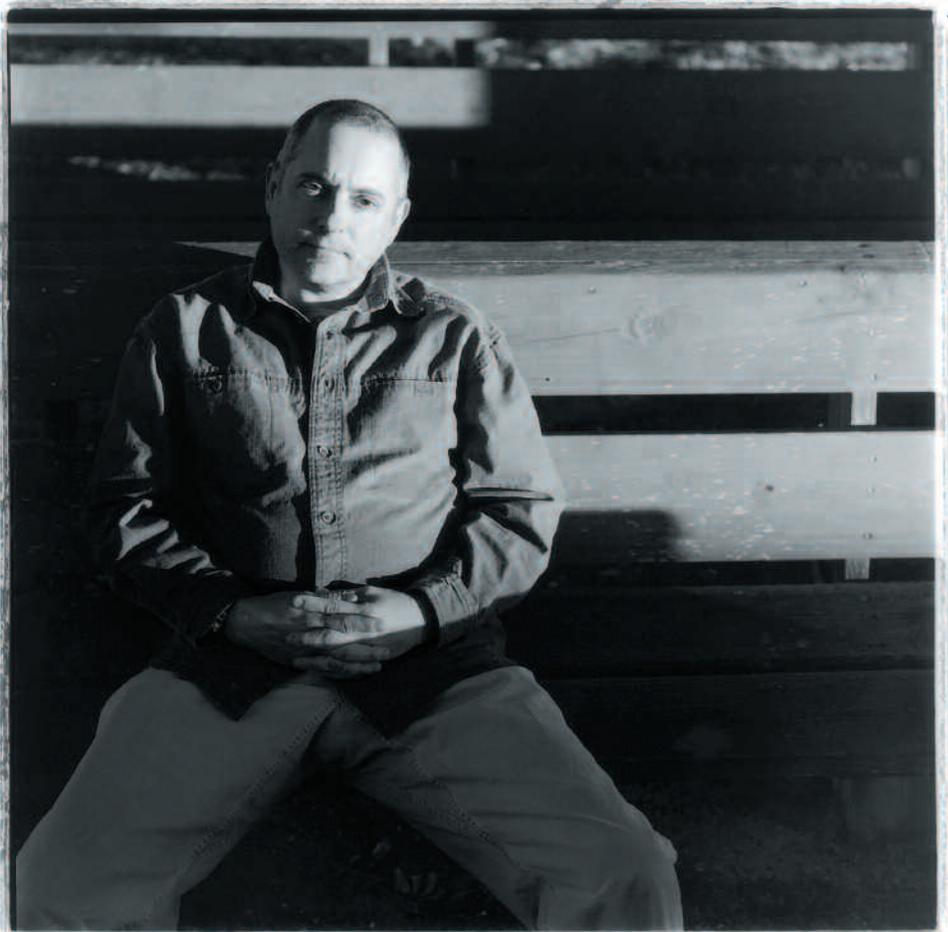
DON Ament, 49, once serviced X-ray machines. For the past fourteen years he has been a full-time artist, working with a different kind of film. Here's how he describes his photography:

"Raven Run Nature Sanctuary in southern Fayette County, Kentucky, provided early and lasting influence on my photography. In contrast to a nagging desire to 'get out of here,' Raven Run was a place that cooled me out, slowed me down, and caused me to get down on my knees.

"Not to pray, but to look at the tiny things growing out of the dirt. My cityfied disconnect from the natural world was somehow rendered irrelevant as I studied wildflowers through the macro lens on those wooded, mid-April trails. This large, round Earth became something to behold, something to cherish. A lot of belly flop photographs were made in those days.

"Today, an ongoing and routinely disturbing internal thrum tends to drive my image making. I can't seem to get away from this attempt to give voice to a planet we have forgotten how to care for. Yet, creating simple images of land, water and sky seems like such small potatoes compared to what really needs to be done. In fact, I find an increasing pull to return to my knees, but not for photography this time.

"Still, there are those rare moments when all concern falls away, when time and space dissolve into the sea of noth-



Byrthe Jamieson

More of Don Ament's work can be seen online at www.donament.com or in person at his studio in Lexington's Loudon House (859/252-8368).

ingness from which they came, and brief contact is made with the Infinite. These miracles happen quietly, quickly, without warning or even reason. Hunched over

the tripod, at the edge of some remote and wild place, a shaft of light moves, a shutter fires, a moment of time is borrowed in an instant of salvation."



Nod to the Orient

Three straight days of dense autumn fog in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina. The area is deserted, everyone else has gone home, because there is nothing to see.



Aspen 'Y' Grove

“All the leaves are off the trees by now, I wouldn’t even bother going up there,” said the man. “OK,” I said, and headed straight up into the southern Utah mountains.



Perspectives

A couple of years ago I spent five days in the Smoky Mountains, walking the same 1 1/2-mile stretch of trail out of the Elkmont Campground. Each day I moved slower. Only in this manner do I find it possible to move beyond the realm of just seeing the picture to, hopefully, feeling it.



Roots

A dark, narrow valley in Kentucky's Red River Gorge area. Soft, reflected "glowlight" filtering in from the stream bank behind me. The film receives a one-minute exposure time on a silent, dead-calm afternoon. Dank earth. Squishy boots. Trickling water. Arrested thoughts. Infinite time, and no time.



Liberals

The wind seems to blow in a consistent direction on Cumberland Island, Georgia.



Ginkgos Dump on Catalpa Street

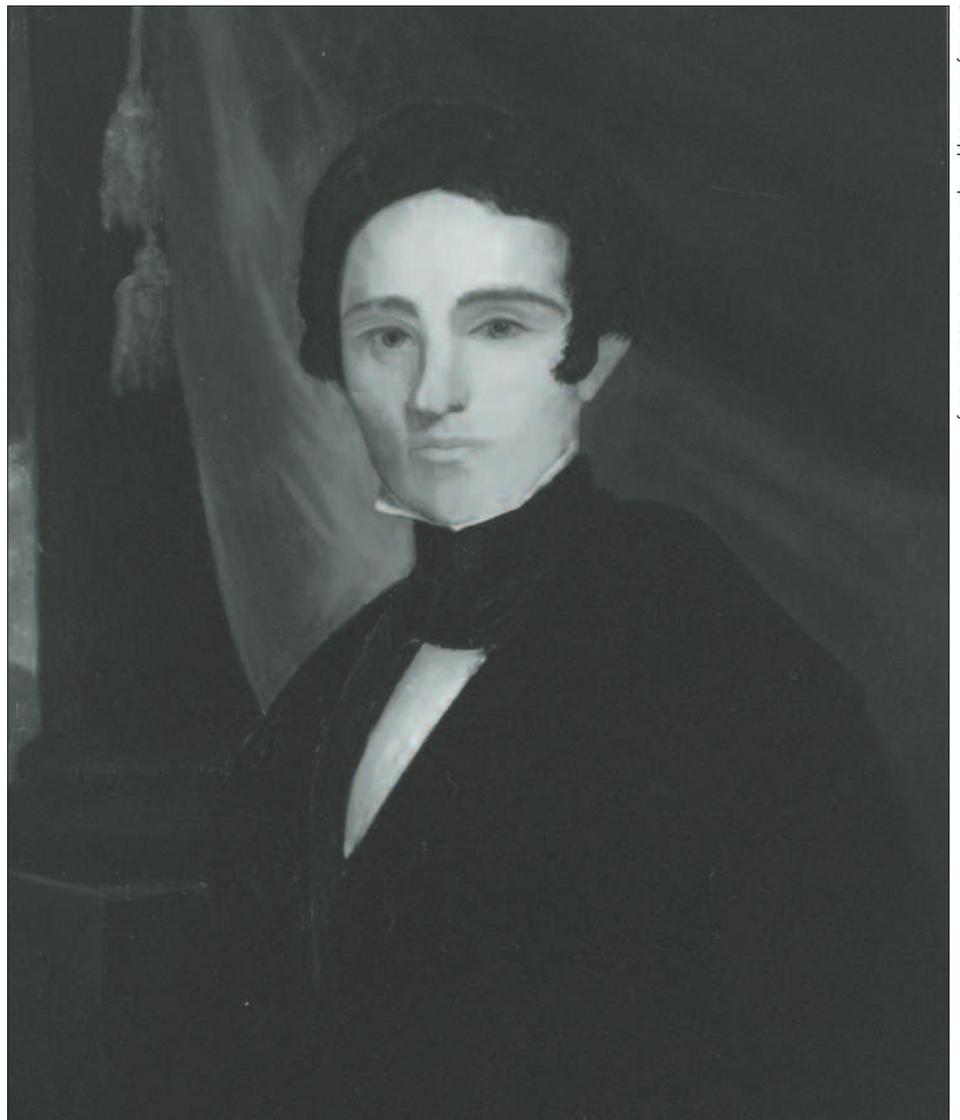
People think this Lexington image is older than it really is, thanks to the Buick. That hand-written political sign on the far left gives you the actual year: it shouts “CHARACTER DOES MATTER! Re-elect Bush/Quayle.”

Alexander McClung was a temperamental native of Mason County, Kentucky. His hair-trigger sense of honor produced numerous trips to the dueling ground and lasting notoriety as the Black Knight of the South.

A Killing Gentleman

ON January 16, 1900 two young Kentucky gentlemen, both officers in the recent Spanish-American War, met by chance in the lobby of the old Capitol Hotel in Frankfort. Bitter rivals due to a wartime quarrel, they immediately opened fire on each other. By the time their pistols fell silent, one of the shooters lay dead, along with four innocent bystanders caught in the crossfire. No doubt there was more than one elderly gentleman of the old school who shook his head in disgust at the news of the incident known as the Scott-Colson tragedy. Had these two young hot-bloods adhered to the *Code Duello* that prevailed up until the Civil War, they could have settled their differences like genuine gentlemen on the “field of honor”—and without all the collateral damage.

Dueling was widespread in the antebellum South, where it persisted longer than it did in any other part of the country. It was a formal, highly ritualized form of violence transplanted from Europe to America during the colonial era. Gentlemen did not settle matters of honor in court. Such matters transcended the law and were settled privately. Honor was all. To endure an insult without retaliation, to walk away from one who publicly denounced you as a liar or coward without a fight, was considered an unbearable disgrace. As the Kentucky orator, wit and duelist Thomas F. Marshall (1801-1864) put it, “If a man calls a Southern boy a liar, that man or that boy must die.”



This portrait of Alexander K. McClung hangs in the Old Capitol Museum in Jackson, Mississippi. McClung was known in Mississippi as a Whig politician and war hero as well as a duelist.

The Honor System

ALTHOUGH antebellum duels sometimes had a rough frontier edge, most encounters were carefully arranged events based on written guidelines, such as John M. Taylor's *Twenty Six Commandments of the Dueling Code*. These 26 commandments first appeared as the *Code Duello*, a document promulgated in 1777 by a committee of Irish gentlemen. The code covered, in great detail, the subject of offenses to a gentleman's honor and the proper way to seek satisfaction. Though duels could, and did, result in death, they were not designed to always be fights to the finish. According to the code, "Any wound sufficient to agitate the nerves and necessarily make the hand shake must end the business for that day."

Initial disputes were generally followed by an exchange of formal notes between the principals. Go-betweens known as seconds delivered such communications, and also selected the dueling ground, settled the terms, and made certain the participants adhered to the rules. Seconds were obligated to try to engineer a peaceful resolution of the dispute, but in some cases the bad blood was so strong that the seconds also ended up exchanging shots. Personal physicians were usually on hand to tend the fallen.

Why didn't people simply refuse to play this often deadly game? Some did, but those who refused challenges were subject to "posting"—a written accusation of cowardice that would be posted publicly, or published in a newspaper. To most Southern gentlemen, that was a fate worse than death.

Kentucky was the scene of several encounters that involved major historical figures, among them Andrew Jackson, Henry Clay and Sam Houston. Despite opposition from ministers and journalists as well as the passage of anti-dueling laws, many Kentuckians preferred to risk their lives on the dueling ground rather than suffer the shame of cowardice. After hearing a Louisville minister preach an anti-dueling sermon in 1835, the venerable John Rowan, who participated in one of Kentucky's most legendary duels, exclaimed, "He might as well preach against courage."

Kentucky also produced the most colorful and perhaps most feared duelist in the entire South—Alexander Keith McClung. Although admired by many as a brilliant orator, skilled journalist and brave soldier, McClung was fated to earn greater notoriety as the dreaded "Black Knight of the South."

A brooding, melancholy romantic, this Kentuckian had a passion for literature, fine clothes and beautiful women. Yet, while courtly and modest in polite

society, McClung had a hair-trigger temper and a weakness for alcohol that cast a dark shadow over his life.

THE notorious duelist was the youngest child of Judge William McClung, a Virginia native who was a prominent jurist and political figure in early Kentucky. In 1793, McClung married Susan Marshall, the brilliant daughter of distinguished Revolutionary War veteran Col. Thomas Marshall and sister of United States Supreme Court Chief Justice John Marshall. Susan was carrying her seventh child when she left her Mason County home in 1811 to visit a gravely ill sister in Virginia. That memorable year witnessed the birth of a son, Alexander Keith, on June 14th in the Old Dominion, and the death of her husband on their Kentucky estate that same summer.

Raised by his widowed mother in Mason County, Alexander was surrounded by sadness and death. By 1822, four of his siblings, including his oldest brother Thomas, had followed their father to the grave. The surviving children, including his

sister Charlotte and his brother John A., who later gained prominence as a clergyman, novelist and historian, were widely regarded as brilliant but "peculiar." Indeed, one contemporary newspaper account claimed that Charlotte, who married Thomas Woolfolk of Woodford County, was quite mad at the time of her early death in 1840. When Rev. John A. McClung was swept to his death over Niagara Falls in 1859, many believed he had taken his own life.

Alexander, the future duelist, gave early evidence of his hot-blooded nature. At the age of fourteen, he was sent off to his uncle's classical school in Woodford County, but apparently didn't remain long. Threatened with punishment, he jumped from a second story window and defiantly returned home. The wild youth entered the naval service on April 22, 1828 and successfully completed training at the New York Naval School. On October 15, the young midshipman joined the crew of the 18-gun sloop of war, *Vandalia*. McClung's vessel sailed from Philadelphia on December 16, 1828 for a three-year tour of duty along the coast of South America.

Benjamin F. Sands, a fellow Kentuckian who served as a midshipman aboard the *Vandalia*, regarded McClung as "in the main, a brave good fellow." However, he also described his comrade as a "regular fire eater" who "entered the service under the impression that to make a good record in the navy it was necessary to fight one's way through it." Indeed, McClung once threatened Sands at sword point over a trivial matter while they were roommates at naval school.

While the *Vandalia* cruised off the coast of Brazil and Uruguay in the spring of 1829, McClung had a violent altercation with Midshipman J.T. Williams. A challenge was sent but before the two adversaries met on the field of honor, McClung fell out with Midshipman Addison C. Hinton. He and Hinton slipped ashore early one morning and traded shots beneath the walls of Montevideo. McClung, who nicked his opponent's right thumb, received a painful flesh wound in the right arm. The Hinton affair, coupled with the Williams altercation, ended McClung's naval career. On

June 1, 1829, he submitted his resignation to Captain John Gallagher, who put McClung ashore at Buenos Aires on August 20.

McCLUNG returned to Kentucky, studying medicine briefly before deciding to pursue a legal career instead. Not long after his arrival home, he fought a bloodless duel with his cousin, James W. Marshall, in Frankfort. According to tradition, McClung, as the challenged party, chose pistols at ten paces. Marshall's first shot missed and McClung gallantly fired his pistol into the air (an action prohibited by the *Code Duello*). His kinsman angrily demanded a second shot, but the seconds stepped in and halted the affair.

In 1833, McClung decided to leave Kentucky and launch his legal career in Mississippi. On January 22, 1834, he was admitted to the Mississippi bar and began to build a practice. However, he soon found himself once again on the dueling field, acting as a second for Henry S. Foote in his encounter with Sergeant S. Prentiss.

Mississippi, like Kentucky and other Southern states, had passed (rarely enforced) anti-dueling legislation. Those hot bloods who did not ignore the law merely crossed the Mississippi at Vicksburg and settled their differences on the Louisiana shore. Foote and Prentiss, two of the most influential lawyers and political figures of their time, were not the only antagonists present that day. McClung had a heated quarrel with Gen. Augustus Albert Allen, who intruded on the grounds as the seconds were preparing

the rivals for the first fire. The Kentuckian was indignant at Allen's conduct, but the latter afterwards sought him out and the dispute was seemingly forgotten.

McClung shortly became embroiled in another bitter war of words with a fire-eater named George W. Coffee. But McClung's anger toward General Allen was rekindled when he learned that Allen had passed along certain comments about Coffee that had

side of the code was quickly revealed when Allen was carried off the field. The shot had struck him full in the mouth, carrying away a portion of his tongue and several teeth and leaving a horrific wound from which he died in great agony.

A member of the Mississippi General Assembly, Allen was a popular man and his tragic death caused a public outcry. Although Allen's seconds testified

After hearing a Louisville minister preach an anti-dueling sermon in 1835, the venerable John Rowan, who participated in one of Kentucky's most legendary duels, exclaimed, "He might as well preach against courage."

been shared in private. An outraged Coffee confronted McClung, who boldly acknowledged that he had called Coffee a "damned coward" in Allen's presence.

However, McClung reserved the weight of his wrath for Allen, whom he suspected of treachery. Angry words traveled fast in the Old South—a heavily armed Allen stormed into Jackson on July 14, 1834. He entered the state house and loudly condemned McClung as a "damned coward, liar and scoundrel." The friends of both men passed along insults and threats until Allen finally sent a formal challenge. McClung dictated terms that revealed his murderous rage and determination to avenge Allen's public insult at all costs. The men agreed to meet along the Pearl River near the state house armed with pistols and Bowie knives. Upon a signal, they would advance toward each other from a distance of eighty yards and fire at will.

Both men advanced in silence until they were within 34 yards of each other. Allen bellowed, "Now Sir, we will see who the damned coward is!" The Kentuckian coolly replied, "Damn you, we will," and fired. Allen, confident that his foe would not fire at such a distance, suddenly crumpled to the ground.

McClung's spectacular shot awed the onlookers (dueling pistols had smooth-bore barrels that made them less accurate than ordinary pistols). However, the dark

that McClung had conducted himself properly, the Kentuckian was compelled to publish an open letter on August 2 defending his actions. The duel with Allen made him notorious overnight as a "killing gentleman."

McClung's notoriety increased after another altercation in the summer of 1837. He challenged one H.C. Stewart, whose conditions amounted to little more than a common frontier knife fight. McClung agreed to duel with sixteen-inch Bowie knives but absolutely refused to agree to the binding of their respective left arms with cords. Gentlemen, he contended, did not bind themselves like slaves and criminals. While the duel never took place, the barbaric terms were circulated in the Northern press as yet another example of Southern savagery.

In late 1838, McClung faced a determined foe in an epic duel that sealed his reputation as the Black Knight of the South. Conflicting accounts obscure the cause of his confrontation with fellow Kentuckian John L. Menefee, a young Vicksburg merchant. According to Harnett Kane's *Gentleman, Swords and Pistols* (1951), McClung and Menefee, who was the brother of Kentucky Congressman Richard H. Menefee, were friends until a summer swim during which some youths playfully stole their clothes.



McClung's peaceful grave in Vicksburg contrasts with his turbulent life.

Menefee reportedly caught one of the boys and began to treat him roughly. McClung protested and, when Menefee turned on him, gave him a thrashing.

Some time afterwards, Menefee and George Coffee, McClung's old enemy, found the Kentuckian alone, unarmed and "stupefied with drink" in a billiard room. Menefee seized a pool cue and gave McClung a savage beating that fractured his skull. As the badly battered McClung was being helped away, Menefee added insult to injury by cursing and kicking him. McClung ordered his friends to halt, wiped the blood from his face and said that he "cared little for the blows with the billiard cue, which could not degrade him, but that for the insult and attempted humiliation of the kick, his life should pay the penalty."

After recovering from his wounds, McClung promptly challenged Menefee, who chose rifles at thirty paces. They agreed to meet across the Mississippi opposite Vicksburg. In his 1874 memoirs, Rev. J.R. Hutchinson of Vicksburg penned a laconic account of the encounter, which took place on Dec. 29, 1838:

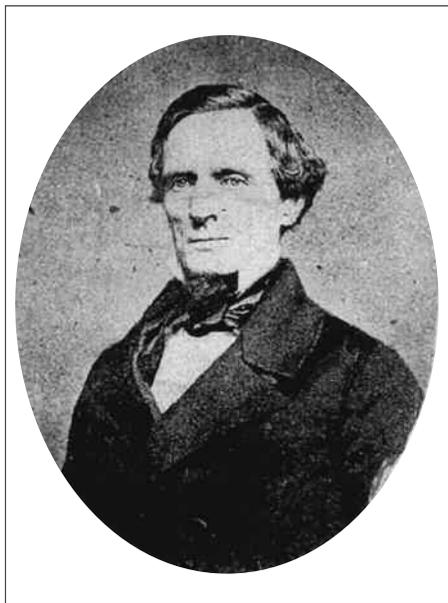
Great preparations were made. Fresh dueling weapons were ordered from New Orleans. Sporting men came from Jackson, Brandon and the interior towns. Bets were freely made and accepted. The hills around the fatal spot were covered with thousands of spectators.

In a letter to his wife in Kentucky, Congressman Richard H. Menefee confessed that he was in "a state of unexpressible anxiety" about the outcome of the duel. Given the weapons and the distance involved, he felt there was little chance "that both can escape, or perhaps neither." He related that he advised his brother by letter to "behave on the occasion like a man." However he confided to his wife prophetically, "But poor fellow! He may have fallen."

Tradition claims that the majority of onlookers expected to witness McClung's death. Menefee was an officer in the Vicksburg Rifles, a local military company, and reportedly a dead shot. According to a contemporary account:

The positions were taken and rifles were placed in the combatants' hands. 'Are you ready?' 'Ready,' both firmly responded. 'Fire; one, two'—here Menefee's rifle exploded, and the bullet whistled by the head of McClung and lodged in a tree that appeared to be on an exact line with the body of the latter.

McClung coolly squeezed the trigger only to have his weapon misfire. Cursing loudly, he flung the rifle away in disgust.



Courtesy of Eison Historical Society

Jefferson Davis, another native Kentuckian, turned out to be McClung's nemesis. They argued over who was the greater hero in the Mexican War, and Davis dealt McClung the final setback of his short life.

The weapon was promptly cleaned and reloaded and both men resumed their positions. McClung's rifle did not fail on the second shot, which struck the cock of Menefee's weapon before he could fire. The bullet split but drove a fragment of the cock deep into Menefee's brain.

When Menefee fell, McClung boldly faced the wrath of the immense crowd. His wounded foe was popular in Vicksburg. At the same time, most of the callous sporting crowd had reportedly bet heavily against McClung. The victor left town hurriedly and on January 4, Menefee died from his wound. On the first Sunday after he was buried with full mil-

itary honors, Rev. Hutchinson preached a sermon entitled the "Code of Honor" that began "Thou shalt not kill."

Whether or not McClung learned of the sermon, he was greatly disturbed by newspaper reports that falsely depicted him as wildly exulting over his victory. According to these accounts, he kissed his rifle when he saw Menefee fall. When told his adversary was only wounded, he reportedly boasted, "I'm G—d d—d glad of that, for now I shall get another shot." While the Vicksburg *Whig* denounced these false tales, the unflattering accounts of his behavior passed into legend and some modern studies.

The Vicksburg duel was McClung's last known affair of honor, but apocryphal tales rooted in the legend of the Black Knight soon took root. He was said to have fought more than fourteen duels in his life and killed ten men. Indeed, it was said that after the Vicksburg duel he was challenged one-by-one by Menefee's seven brothers—and killed them all.

In reality, his well-earned reputation as a "killing gentleman" led many rivals to avoid any chance of an armed encounter. According to one account McClung, probably in his cups, was sharing a table in a hotel dining room when he rudely dipped his knife into the common butter dish. A disgusted diner called out, "Waiter, come take this butter off the table! This man stuck his knife in it." An enraged McClung immediately crammed the butter dish full in the stranger's face and shouted, "Waiter, come take this butter off the table. This man stuck his nose in it."

The furious stranger wiped his face and handed McClung his card. The Kentuckian responded in kind. After a quick glance at the name, the stranger reportedly stammered, "Just let me have my card back; that is all I ask." He then beat a hasty retreat while McClung quietly resumed his meal.

AN ardent Whig, McClung launched a party newspaper in Jackson, *The True Issue*, which ably supported the 1840 presidential campaign of William Henry Harrison. Impressed by his editorial skills, Whig leaders appointed McClung to draft the

party's official address to the people of Mississippi at the State Convention. In the aftermath of Harrison's victory, McClung was duly appointed U.S. Marshal for the Northern District of Mississippi in 1841. After the Whigs lost the White House in 1844, McClung resigned his office and stumped Lowndes County in the summer of 1845 in an unsuccessful bid for state representative. His defeat was offset by the fact that the race established his reputation as a skilled, dramatic orator.

The outbreak of the Mexican War saw McClung's star rise dramatically. Appointed second in command of Col. Jefferson Davis' Mississippi Rifles, he commanded the regiment's left wing at the battle of Monterrey on September 31, 1846. Waving his sword over his head, McClung was the first man over the wall in the desperate assault on the fortress at La Teneria. He was rushing toward the enemy's second line of defense when he staggered and fell with a severe gunshot wound that shattered his left hand and passed through his hip.

McClung's wounds were so grave that he was once reported dead. However, after a lengthy and painful recovery he returned to Mississippi in 1847 as a military hero. As politically ambitious as he

Both men immediately sought public office on the basis of their war records. However, while Davis won election to the U.S. Senate, McClung was defeated as a Whig candidate for Congress. In the spring of 1848, McClung ran as an elector for the state at large in support of Zachary Taylor's presidential bid. Taylor's victory led many to believe that McClung would be richly rewarded for his zealous efforts on behalf of the Whig party. Finally, after weeks of silence, he was no doubt stunned to learn that he had won only the scantest crumbs of political patronage—the post of Charges d'Affaires to Bolivia. Many of his friends advised him to refuse the position. McClung, who was in dire financial straits, swallowed his pride and accepted the mission on May 29, 1849.

On July 3, 1850 he arrived at his new post and presented his diplomatic credentials to the Bolivian government. The dull routine in the Bolivian capital was occasionally livened by minor uprisings and public executions. In the spring of 1851, McClung clashed with the Bolivian foreign minister over the tone of an official communication. Believing he had been deliberately insulted, McClung responded, "The illegitimacy of your birth and your extremely low associations previously to the revolutionary accident which elevated you to the post of Minister of Foreign Affairs . . . would naturally render you unaccustomed to the practice of the courtesy and breeding appropriate to your office . . ."

There is no record of the response to this insult, but on April 15, McClung formally requested to be recalled. Weeks passed without a reply. On June 30, 1851 McClung characteristically notified Secretary of State Daniel Webster that he planned to leave Bolivia "without waiting for the permission I had solicited."

McClung's return from Bolivia marked a turning point in his personal and political fortunes. He visited his former Kentucky home while en route to

Both men advanced in silence until they were within 34 yards of each other. Allen bellowed, "Now Sir, we will see who the damned coward is!" The Kentuckian coolly replied, "Damn you, we will," and fired.

was contentious, McClung took exception to Jefferson Davis' official report of the battle of Monterrey. Throughout 1847, they duelled in the press over who first ordered the regiment to charge and who first reached the enemy's works. The public quarrel turned McClung and Davis into enemies.

The New York Times

Story of a Brave Man.

The telegraph briefly announces this morning the suicide at Jackson, Miss., of Colonel ALEXANDER K. McCLUNG. Our manuscript dispatch read, "Col. McCLUNG, the Duellist;" but he was otherwise distinguished, in a very eventful life in the Southwest, than for his prowess under the bloody "Code of Honor," and deserves, in death, to be remembered as well for the good which he did, as for the . . .

The New York Times published McClung's obituary on March 27, 1855. It called his story "sanguinary," but "not without reliefs."

McClung, the Times wrote, was "a brave man for his country in war, as well as a desperate one in defence of his own perhaps too sensitive honor, in peace."

Mississippi, reportedly "broken down in health and prey to remorse." Despite the glory he won in Mexico and his increased political stature, success eluded him. His law practice had virtually ceased to exist. By the early 1850's, he was sinking ever deeper in debt.

McClung's personal life followed the same pattern. Tall and handsome, the romantic, brooding Kentuckian was popular among the belles of his day. Writing in 1904, Virginia Tunstall Clay declared, "He was the gallantest lover that ever knelt at a lady's feet." Yet, as many women no doubt discovered, McClung "was a man of fitful, uncertain moods and given to periods of the deepest melancholy. At such times he would mount his horse, 'Rob Roy,' wild and untamable as himself, and dash to the cemetery, where he would throw himself down on a convenient grave and stare like a madman into the sky for hours."

McClung's heavy drinking accelerated after his return from Bolivia. Invited to deliver a eulogy for the great Whig Henry Clay at the Mississippi state house on October 11, 1852, McClung was reportedly in a beastly state of intoxication the night before the event. But when the hour arrived, he delivered what was afterwards proclaimed as one of the greatest speeches in Mississippi's

history. This proved to be his final triumph. In the months that followed he became increasingly withdrawn, morose and violent. In 1929, one of Jackson's oldest residents recalled that McClung's binges led mothers to caution their children to avoid "his side of the street."

In his 1890 memoirs, McClung's friend, Reuben Davis, who represented Mississippi in both the U.S. and Confederate Congresses, recalled an episode

McClung to expect his application to be denied, and invited him to join a secret military expedition to liberate Cuba from Spanish rule. Quitman's prediction proved sound. McClung's bitter foe, Jefferson Davis, had been appointed Secretary of War by President Franklin Pierce, and his application was rejected.

Not long afterwards, on March 24, 1855, McClung bathed, shaved and changed into his finest attire in his room

Invited to deliver a eulogy for Henry Clay, McClung was reportedly in a beastly state of intoxication the night before the event. But when the hour arrived, he delivered what was afterwards proclaimed as one of the greatest speeches in Mississippi's history. This was his final triumph.

that occurred all too frequently in McClung's last days. Davis and two friends, both roundly detested by McClung, entered a popular Jackson restaurant only to find it occupied by a solitary drinker. McClung, with a bottle, two pistols and a bowie knife on the table before him, had driven every other customer from the place. "He had been drinking heavily for some days," Davis recalled, "and had reached a state of actual insanity." The three diners wolfed down their meals in haste while McClung, wildly waving his weapons about, raved that he had just driven off three assassins. Although courteous to Davis, McClung, his eyes blazing with rage, held the party at gunpoint until they admitted they believed his wild tale. "We were then permitted to depart," Davis wrote, "which we did with more haste than ceremony."

IN early 1855, McClung desperately attempted to reverse his declining fortunes by seeking a commission in one of the new regiments being raised for frontier service by the Federal government. His old commander in Mexico, General John A. Quitman, warned

at the Eagle Hotel in Jackson. He had previously asked a local carpenter to design a wooden plank with a deep notch in one end. After positioning the plank against his bed, he lay down so that his head rested in the v-shaped notch. He placed a small silver derringer against his head and pulled the trigger. The blood ran down the board so that not a single drop stained his fine clothes. Near his body lay a bit of melancholy verse entitled "Ode to Death." He was 43.

The tragic fate of the Black Knight spawned legends of a duelist driven to suicide by the ghosts of his victims. There is evidence that McClung's profound melancholy was rooted in the remorse he felt as a man of blood. Yet he lived by the code of death before dishonor, and the shame of failure could only be washed away by his own blood.

A blaze of light without a focus, Alexander Keith McClung was, in many ways, as brilliant and erratic as his celebrated first cousin, Thomas F. Marshall. Also a politician and duelist of note, Marshall drank himself to death in 1864. Like his kinsman, McClung, despite his literary skills and rhetorical gifts, could not master his demons. As Reuben Davis

lamented: "Poor McClung! His nature was too high strung. The disappointments and difficulties of life maddened him and he died by his own hand."

McClung lived in a violent era in which deeply held convictions about honor, shame and courage led men to openly disregard anti-dueling laws. Indeed, the duel was only one aspect of the climate of violence that surrounded him. In this sense, he was a man of his times. Many members of his notable family, including his uncle, Dr. Lewis Marshall, as well as his cousin Thomas, fought duels in their lifetimes. However, in an era in which violent, hard-drinking gentlemen were far from rare, McClung stood out. More than any other figure in Southern history, the Black Knight symbolized the dark side of the Code of Honor. ●

James M. Prichard is the Research Room Supervisor at the Kentucky State Archives in Frankfort. A longtime member of the Kentucky Humanities Council Speakers Bureau, this is his second article for *Kentucky Humanities*. He wrote about the murderous Harpe brothers in April 2006.

A Note on Sources:

In addition to early newspapers, public records and the McClung biographical file at the Mississippi Department for Archives and History; this article was primarily based on the following sources:

"Sketches of Our Volunteer Officers: Alexander Keith McClung," *Southern Literary Messenger*, Vol. XXI (January, 1855)

Henry S. Foote, *A Casket of Reminiscences* (1874)

Reuben Davis, *Recollections of Mississippi and Mississippians* (1890)

Benjamin F. Sands, *From Reefer to Rear Admiral: Reminiscences and Journal Jottings of Nearly Half a Century of Naval Life* (1899)

Ada Sterling (Ed.), *A Belle of the Fifties: Memoirs of Mrs. Clay of Alabama* (1904)

Rev. William McClung, *The McClung Genealogy* (1904)

Harnett C. Kane, *Gentlemen, Swords and Pistols* (1951)

Menefee Family Papers, Filson Historical Society



Photo by Philip Gould, from the New Harmonies exhibit

Nathan Williams leads his Zydeco Cha Chas in a Mardi Gras parade in St. Martinville, Louisiana.

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Photo by Walter Larrimore, from the New Harmonies exhibit

A scene from the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian powwow, 2005.

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- May 3-June 14, 2008:** Riverbend Academy, Henderson 270/827-9420
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Our Lincoln Triumphs

The Council's tribute to Abraham Lincoln thrilled a sold-out house

SIX months of planning, almost 400 performers, an audience of more than 1,500—the numbers are impressive, but they don't begin to tell the real story of the magical evening of Sunday, February 10, 2008 at the Singletary Center for the Arts in Lexington. *Our Lincoln*, the Humanities Council gala that

kicked off Kentucky's two-year celebration of Abraham Lincoln's 200th birthday on February 12, 2009, was about much more than numbers. It was about pride in the native son who became the sixteenth president of the United States. It was about awe at the qualities of intellect, strength and compassion that made

Our Lincoln closed with the *Battle Hymn of the Republic*, performed by the Lexington Philharmonic, the Lexington Singers, and the American Spiritual Ensemble. They are all on stage as the producers take their bows before a standing ovation.

him great. It was about gratitude for a legacy that is still vibrantly alive.

From the orchestral thunder of Copland's *A Lincoln Portrait* to the plaintive strains of the *Ashokan Farewell*, played by two violins, it was an evening made memorable by the extraordinary musical and dramatic performances of these Kentucky artists: Master of Ceremonies Nick Clooney, the Lexington Philharmonic Orchestra, the Lexington Singers and Children's Choir, the University of Kentucky Opera Theatre, the American Spiritual Ensemble, the Lexington Vintage Dance Society, the Kentucky Repertory Theatre, violinists Nathan Cole and Akiko Tarumoto, and five members of our Kentucky Chautauqua troupe portraying Abraham and Mary Todd Lincoln, Henry Clay, Emilie Todd Helm, and Margaret Garner.

We are grateful to everyone whose support made *Our Lincoln* possible, but most especially we thank all of those who filled the Singletary Center to capacity, giving *Our Lincoln* a sense of occasion worthy of its subject.



Abe Lincoln (Jim Sayre) and Henry Clay (George McGee) with Juanita Betz Peterson.



Master of Ceremonies Nick Clooney (center) with *Our Lincoln* co-producers Everett McCorvey, director of the University of Kentucky Opera Theatre (left), and Virginia G. Carter, director of the Kentucky Humanities Council, Inc. (right).

Our deepest thanks to the major sponsors who made *Our Lincoln* possible:



Kentucky Chautauquans met with patrons after the show. From left, Erma Bush as Margaret Garner, Angela Bartley as Mary Todd Lincoln, Jim Sayre as Abraham Lincoln, George McGee as Henry Clay, and Gov. and Mrs. Brereton C. Jones.

Photo by Ken Hedrich, from the Between Fences exhibit



The ubiquitous chain link fence is long on strength but short on privacy: Chicago, Illinois, 1955.

Between Fences

We may take them for granted, but this Smithsonian exhibit shows how fences have always been crucial to our way of life

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ing and enlightening! Be sure to catch it when it's in your neighborhood.

Between Fences is presented by the Kentucky Humanities Council with invaluable assistance from the Smithsonian Institution, the Federation of State Humanities Councils, and the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet.

Photo by Steven Brook Studios, from the Between Fences exhibit



The picket fence is the very symbol of home. Developers used it freely in Seaside, Florida.

Photo by Russell Lee, from the Between Fences exhibit



An American invention, the worm (or zigzag) fence was easy to build because it required no posts: St. Augustine County, Texas, 1939.

Between Fences

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- December 6, 2008-January 17, 2009:** Georgetown & Scott County Museum, Georgetown 502/863-6201
- January 24-February 21, 2009:** Pine Mountain State Resort Park, Pineville 606/337-3066
- February 28-April 18, 2009:** Wrather West Kentucky Museum, Murray 270/809-3823
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Admission is free. Call for museum hours.

Four New Members Join Humanities Council Board of Directors

THE Kentucky Humanities Council has welcomed four new members to its Board of Directors. They were elected by the standing Board to three-year terms that are renewable for three additional years. These new members will represent the Council in their home areas, set policies, review grant applications, and raise money for the more than 500 public humanities programs the Council supports every year. These programs reached all but six of the Commonwealth's 120 counties in 2007. The Council and its community partners invest more than \$1 million annually in public humanities programs for Kentuckians.



Geoffrey A. Hall (Lexington) is a vice president and portfolio manager for National City bank. He has 18 years of experience in portfolio management and investment consulting.

Before joining National City in 2007, he worked with TIAA-CREF, Fifth Third Bank, and Merrill Lynch. A native Kentuckian, Hall is a graduate of Kentucky Wesleyan College and holds an M.B.A. from Xavier University.



Lynn T. Harpring (Louisville) is a partner in Harpring & Pope, which provides insurance, investment, and financial planning services to clients in the Louisville area.

A graduate of Bellarmine College, Harpring has served on the boards of many organizations, including the Bellarmine Board of Overseers and the Board of Trustees of the Kentucky Retirement Systems.

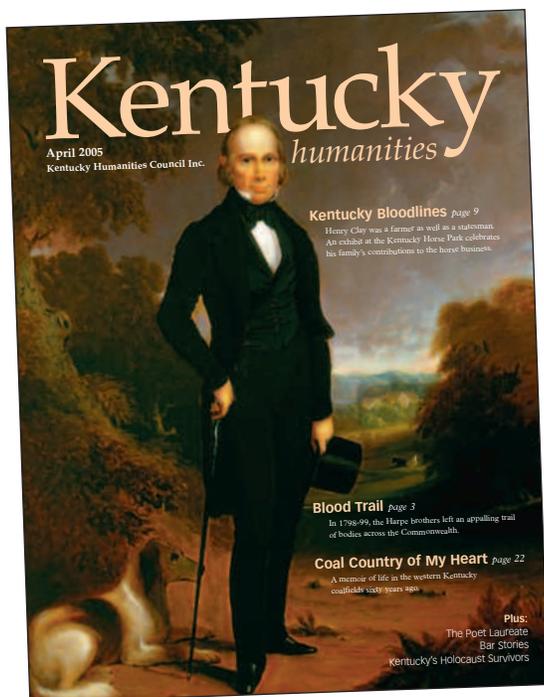


Guy LaJeunesse (Covington) is Executive Director of the Carnegie Visual and Performing Arts Center in Covington. A graduate of Asbury College, he also studied at several leading European museums. With an extensive background in museums, performing arts organizations, schools and libraries, he describes himself as a "hybrid mix of entrepreneur, artist, communicator, and salesman."



Kenneth H. Wolf (Murray) is a semi-retired professor of history at Murray State University, where he began teaching in 1969. His areas of interest include German history and European intellectual history.

Wolf holds a doctorate from the University of Notre Dame. He recently completed a six-year term as Murray State's representative to the board of the University Press of Kentucky.



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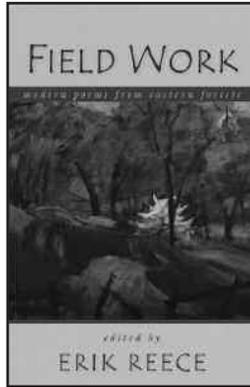
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