

the sap's risin', the maple is tender, you know, you can bend it. That's the beauty about this white oak, the reason we use it, you can bend it and it'll stay just where you put it."

We talked about the caves and what the local folk thought about them and I asked him about Floyd Collins, martyred local, whose fame spread to other areas by way of a song made up about him. His reply surprised me.

"I remember where Collins got trapped. And it's all such a common thing with us. We just didn't pay any attention to it. My brother-in-law, B. Doyle, my first wife's brother, owned the property where that sand-cave was located, and it's an actual fact, he got trapped in there . . . died in there. They finally brought him out in many months, two, three, years. . . . Yes, there was a song about Floyd Collins in that sand-cave. Yes, there was. But I never did learn it."

He did remember the ballad "Pearl Bryant," a widespread and rather gory song popular in the area years ago. After singing it he explained how he came to learn the song, providing an enlightening background to the ballad, and a good story to boot.

"Well, I learned that by word of mouth—tradition. That was, ah, I barely can remember when this happened. It happened up in the eastern part of the state, here in Kentucky. This Scott Jackson was a medical student, going to school, he was in love with this Pearl Bryant, and things happened that do happen to young people and he wanted to make away with her, you know. And he took her out and he killed her. And he was hanged for it. The two of 'em . . . there was two of 'em hanged. But the other fellow was actually reported not to have much to do with the crime. He just went along with it. And, ah, he cut her head off. And his sister . . . her sister rather . . . Pearl Bryant's sister, begged Scott Jackson to tell where her head was. And he never would tell. And the man that was hanged with him pled with him, told him, 'Now, if you tell the whole truth, I won't have to die.' Jackson told him, 'If I die, you'll have to.' Now this is just tradition, this is hearsay. And they were both hanged. And later on they found a skull, somewhere in that area, and it was supposed to have been the skull of Pearl Bryant. Yeah, I can barely remember it. Not the actual incident, but when it was fresh on people's mine, they talked so much about it you know. Warning the girls 'Be careful who you went out with.'"

Fitting material for any tabloid newspaper today, but much more colorfully told!

"LOOK AT BROWN RUN": PLACE NAMES IN KENTUCKY

Robert Rennick

Of all the things about Kentucky that have impressed my friends from other sections of the country, I am convinced that none have quite the appeal of our colorful place names. Scores of letters are received annually by our Kentucky Historical Society, our research libraries, our state and local newspapers, and me asking how certain places had acquired their unusual names. When we can, which isn't often, we send the authenticated account of the derivation of the requested name. Otherwise, with tongue in cheek and wink of eye, we pass on some old story that local residents have told and long accepted to explain the name, either a highly implausible yarn or an account that has the ring of authenticity but which has never been verified.

Here are the traditional accounts of several of Kentucky's more provocative place names that I've often been asked to share with my friends.

A Mr. King is known to have been among the first settlers of the Letcher County valley formed by what was later called *Kingdom Come Creek*. According to local legend, when later settlers arrived in that valley and asked who'd come first, the answer was usually "King done come."

An early settler of the Cabin Creek area of Lewis

Robert Rennick is the Coordinator of the Kentucky Place Names Survey, Place Names Survey of the United States.

This river, now impounded, is said to have been called "Nolin" after a search party in the area was unable to locate a pioneer named Lin. Photo by David Sutherland.

County, a man named Brown, got his living by stealing from his neighbors. One of them, after noticing his corn was disappearing from the corn patch, decided to lie in wait to trap the offender. When Brown showed up, the neighbor confronted him with a stick and chased him down the creek. Another man was milking his cow when his wife saw Brown rushing by and she called her husband, "Look at Brown run." Since then the stream along which he made his getaway has been known as *Browns Run*.

They say that the Wolfe County town of *Helechawa* was named for the fact that, many years ago, there was only one road leading into or out of the place, a dirt road that was so bad that people would say it was hell-each-a-way. An Indian derivation might seem more plausible, I suppose, but we can come up with something still better historically, though perhaps not as reasonable: *Helechawa* is one of the over one-thousand populated places in Kentucky that were named for persons—in this case, for the daughter of the first president of the Ohio and Kentucky Railroad, a man named Wallbridge. It's an acronym of the three parts of her name: Helen Chase Wallbridge—*HELECHAWA*.

Not all local place name legends need be scoffed at as probable outright fabrications. There may be some truth to many of them; at least the kernel of a real incident may have been preserved in the oral account but, with each re-telling, some changes occurred. For instance—

Years ago, in McCreary County, there was an inn where travelers would stop to spend the night. They'd be asked by the innkeeper the number of ears of corn to put in the feedbox for their horses. If the guest said 10 or 12 ears, the innkeeper would drop in 3 or 4 and then he'd throw in some pine knots to make the required number. Since pine knots usually sound like ears of corn when dropped into a box and the guest probably wasn't paying much attention, he nearly always was deceived. The town of *Pine Knot* came by its name in this fashion.

Near the mouth of *Frozen Creek*, in Breathitt County, there used to stand a large sycamore tree with a hollow trunk. Local people believe that Daniel Boone and some hunting companions were in that area one winter and decided to spend the

night in the trunk. They like to froze to death and the following morning, when they departed, they agreed to call that stream "*Frozen Creek*."

A common theme in place naming legendry is the naming of a post office in desperation. The name of the Lee County town of *Fixer* is said to have been derived from the response of a frustrated and desperate local citizen who found that each name he sent to the Post Office department in Washington was already in use somewhere in the state. (There's always been this rule that no two post offices in a state are to have the same name.) Finally

he wrote to the department and said he was tired of sending in names and for them to fix her. So the place was officially named *Fixer*.

Nobob Creek, in Barren County, is said to have been named in this fashion: a party of hunters camping on the creek were accustomed to going forth early each morning and returning to the camp at nightfall. One night a member of the party, named Bob, failed to return. For several days his companions searched for him but each night they came back to report "No Bob." The very same story has been told to account for the naming of *Nolin River*.

Through Knox County runs *Stinking Creek* whose name, it's been said, was derived from the odor given off by many dead buffalo which had been killed

along the banks. Or maybe it was a large wounded buffalo that had wandered off into the creek to die. After a while it started stinking so badly that some of the settlers nearby had to move.

Mousie, in Knott County, was named for Mrs. Mousie Gibson, nee Martin, who is said to have received her given name when her grandfather suggested to her parents that since they already had a daughter named Kitty, they ought to name the next one Mousie.

The stories related above are a sampling of the literally hundreds that, over the years, have been told to account for the names of Kentucky places. Some may be true; others we know are not. Place names scholars and folklorists in our state are currently attempting to track down and explain all of Kentucky's over 100,000 place names in the hope of compiling a dictionary. We need all the help and encouragement we can get.

