

Big Bone Springs Hotel

*The History of an Early Landmark at Big Bone,
Boone County, Kentucky, with Documents, Maps,
and Illustrations, based on Original Research.*

by

James Duvall, M. A.

Big Bone, Kentucky

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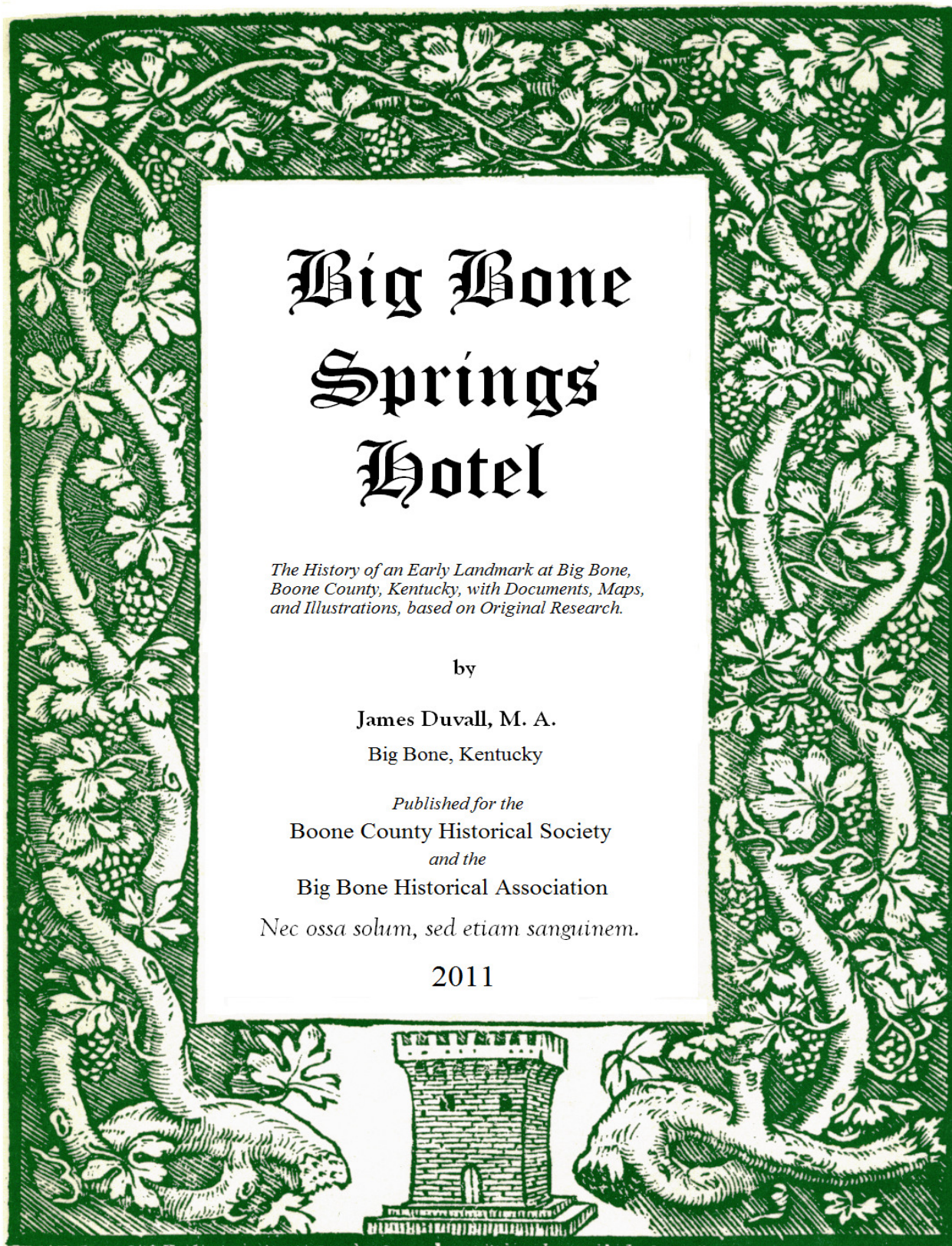
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Nec ossa solum, sed etiam sanguinem.

2011



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A new era of travel on the Ohio began in 1811 with the *New Orleans* coming down the river from Pittsburgh to its namesake at the mouth of the Mississippi.¹ Throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century the river with its steamboats would be the most important means of travel to and from Big Bone Lick.

There must have been a tavern at Big Bone at this time. Zadoc Cramer, author and publisher of the famous *Navigator*, which went through numerous editions, wrote in the edition of 1811: "The Big Bone Lick is in the state of Kentucky, 20 miles from Cincinnati, on the road leading from the town to the falls of Ohio...it is worth a visit to the curious, and the superior intelligence and hospitality of its worthy proprietor makes such a visit well paid for."² Cramer comments on the fact that there was no ground around the lick cleared, and on the thousands of pigeons which flock there, so many they broke down trees.

The hotel was most likely built about 1815. The next year John Wingate (1774-1851), a hotel keeper from Cincinnati, and a native of the state of New York was granted a tavern license. Wingate had been with "Mad Anthony" Wayne at the Battle of Fallen Timbers. In 1810 he was made a Brigadier General of the Ohio Militia and served in the War of 1812. General Wingate kept the old Cincinnati Hotel on Front Street before

¹ Mary N. Dohan, *Mr. Roosevelt's Steamboat* (N.Y.: Dodd, Mead, 1981), p. 60-61: This boat passed by Big Bone 27 Oct 1811 and was observed by Boone County Residents. Letter of Philip Bush 9 July 1862.

² Zadoc Cramer. *The Navigator* (Pittsburgh: Zadoc Cramer, 1811).

moving to Big Bone.³ The Court Order reads: "License is granted unto John Wingate to keep a tavern at the Big Bone for one [year] from the 5th of June last who entered into Bond with Benjamin Fowler his Security pursuant to law."⁴

A biographical sketch of Wingate, written in 1882 states that he "kept a house of entertainment" at Big Bone Lick for severals and then moved West. I cannot determine when he went west or how long he stayed, but Wingate was appointed Justice of the Peace in 1818. Wingate had married a widow, Mrs. Torrence in 1809, and we find in the Boone County Guardian Book in 1825 that he and Benjamin Johnson were appointed guardians for John H. Torrence, infant son of John Torrence, after her death.⁵

We do not know exactly how long Gen. Wingate remained at Big Bone, but he may have been gone by 1821 when Professor Rafinesque reported the owner was a "very surly man" —not the impression we get of Wingate—who refused to allow him to dig for bones. John Wingate seems to have been well-liked, and when he returned to Ohio in 1851, his funeral which occurred a few weeks later, was attended by a large number of friends. He was given Ohio, with firing of guns, and tolling of church bells.

Staying at the Tavern would not have been expensive. The tavern rates were set by the County Court for 1819 as follows:⁶

Breakfast, Dinner, or Supper each. 25 ct.
Lodging per night 12 1/2
Whisky per 1/2 pint 12 1/2
Peach Brandy per 1/2 pint 18 3/4

³ A History and Biographical Cyclopaedia of Butler County, Ohio (Cincinnati: Western Publishing Company, 1882).

⁴ Boone County Order Book A-379, October Term 1816.

⁵ Court Order Book 1818; Boone County Guardian Book, 1821-1829, entry of 3 January 1825. There is also a John Wingate reported in the 1830 Census of Boone County. The oldest male is reported as between forty and fifty. Wingate should have been sixty-six in 1830. There are a total of nine people in the household, including a female slave.

⁶ See the various order books. It is not strange that the Court should set tavern rates and set licenses; it is a very old tradition. See Albrecht Goetze "Tavern Keepers and the Like in Ancient Babylonia," Studies in Honor of Benno Landsberger (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), p. 211-215. The tablet records the oaths sworn by Utul-Ishtar the scribe, commissioned to collect the annual tax from the tavern keepers under King Ammiditana, King in the dynasty after Hammurapi.

Wine, Rum & French Brandy per 1/2 pint 37 1/2
Gin per 1/2 Quart 12 1/2
Cider per Quart 12 1/2
Corn or Oats per gallon 12 1/2
Stableage & Hay per horse per night 25
Pasturage per horse per night per 12 hours 12 1/2
Cherry bounce per 1/2 pint 18 3/4
Porter per bottle 31 1/4
Beer per Quart 18 3/4

A few comments on this rate schedule should be made: first, the rates stayed the same for years at a time. When they did change they were not always higher: The meal, which had been 25 cents in 1818 and the year following, was 20 cents in 1830. The lodging in 1830 was 8 cents for the night. Whisky was 6 1/4 cents and Peach Brandy 12 1/2 cents. Wine and Rum were down from 37 1/2 cents to 25 cents. This change in prices probably reflects the better transportation available, which made supplies more plentiful, and so cheaper. Pasturage for a horse for twelve hours remained at 12 1/2 cents; stableage and hay went from 25 cents to 18 3/4 cents. There were no changes in 1831, but by 1835 wine and French brandy were up to 37 1/2 cents and a meal was back up to 25 cents; lodging was still 8 cents per night. In 1844 the list was still virtually the same—"Lodging per Knight" (somebody must have gotten distracted) was 12 1/2 cents—the same John Wingate would have charged by law.

In 1812 there were three taverns licensed in Boone County; there had been four in 1809. These three taverns paid a tax of \$30.00 to the Commonwealth. By 1817 there were five tavern licenses issued, and that doubtless included the establishment of John Wingate. In the court orders of the period there are many items concerned with county roads, as transportation was one of the most intractable problems of the period. For 1818 we find an entry: "The view of a way for a road from Burlington by Miller's Mill on Gunpowder to the Big Bone road was returned into Court, examined..."⁷ The next month we read: "James Ryle, Sr., is appointed surveyor of the road from Garnett's Mill towards Big Bone as far as to Gunpowder in the room of Gilbert Campbell, who is exempted

⁷ Court Order Book, June Term, 1818, p. 54.

therefrom, and to be assisted by the same hands in keeping said road in repair."⁸ It appears there was often a good deal more said about roads than done, and the weather changes must have made most of them impassable the biggest part of the time to anything on wheels. A tally of the number of riding carriages in the county was required for state taxation, and it is perhaps the single most significant commentary on the state of the roads in 1811 that there was reported a single two-wheeled riding carriage in the entire country—if there had been another, everyone would have known about it. In 1812 there were a total of three—one of them actually had four wheels—and the tax due was on eight wheels. It seems reasonable to assume that there was a kind of correspondence between the number of wheels around and the state of the roads, which did gradually improve.⁹ For the most part the roads were for local use, but entries such as the following make clear that by the 1830's things were much better: "The report of the reviewers of an alteration in that part of the Big Bone road leading from Clay's Post office to the Big Bone Lick was recorded and said alteration established as the publick highway and the old way discontinued."¹⁰ The Post Office mentioned here is almost surely the hotel, and this is evidence that the name was the Clay Hotel.

We do not have any detail about how the establishment at the Spring was run, or what was available. There is little reason to suppose it was much different from other taverns in the area. While the actual arrangements may have been different, it probably offered about the same services as the tavern of Thomas Henderson, a six-room log structure built in 1815. Henderson, a Baptist minister, bought it in 1822.¹¹

This tavern, with six large rooms, three on each floor, each of which was about twenty feet square, was considered extremely large at the time. The lodging cost six cents a night, with or without a bed — late-comers slept on the floor. Henderson owned a

⁸ Ibid. July Term, 1818, p. 56.

⁹ See Boone County Tax lists.

¹⁰ This new section was proposed April 1835 (see Court Orders, p. 522) and adopted according to the report quoted June 1835 (p. 543).

¹¹ Henderson bought 341 acres from William Sanders, 20 February 1822, for \$2,064, which included the log tavern.

number of slaves, and some of the children waited on the tables. It is said they were required to whistle while carrying food to the customers to ensure they did not sample the food. This establishment, including the main taverns, five slave cabins, and outbuildings such as animal shelters and corn-cribs, totaled eighteen buildings.



For the decade between 1822 and 1832 the tavern was run for Henderson by Col. Littleton Robinson, at which time they had a dispute over a slave sale, Henderson suing to recover two hundred dollars Robinson allegedly kept for himself, and thereafter it was run by the family. Conditions were probably similar at Big Bone, and the actual proprietors were not the owners of the land.¹²

We have an account of a visit to the Spring at this period. The accommodations are described as "ample" without giving any details which would now be of interest. This was in an article by (1783-1840), scientist and Professor at Transylvania University. He was a prolific writer, and indefatigable collector of botanical specimens on which he published many volumes. He produced the first comprehensive account of the fish in the Ohio River, and many other studies of natural science.¹³ He wrote of his visit in 1821: "I

¹² Henderson, Census of 1820

¹³ See the biography of Rafinesque, *A Voice in the Wilderness*.

remained several days at the Lick, which is a watering place, with ample accommodations; but I found the actual owner a very surly man, who would no longer allow any excavations, having imbibed the notion that digging would take away water from the spring, around which a pavilion and seats had lately been erected." I like the word play "imbibed" the notion; Rafinesque surveyed the area for Indian mounds, visited the landing, noted the soil type, and geological structure of the valley—it was not a wasted visit. He noted of the springs themselves: "The water at the Lick springs contains salt and sulphur; it has a bluish cast, like that of the Blue licks, on Licking river; both are limpid, but of an abominable taste, although readily drank by the idlers who come there to loiter, drink, bathe, and kill the game—very plenty yet on the hills."¹⁴ The hunting was for small game, the bison being long gone; but it is evident that the area is already a resort for health and recreation, and the abundant game was an attraction for many.

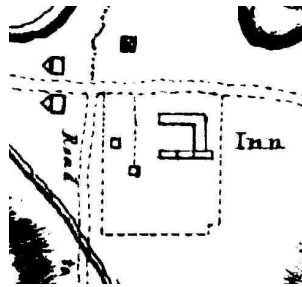
Rafinesque



Rafinesque visited Landing, about two miles from the Lick on the River and found it a very inconvenient place to land. Rafinesque had come by road from Cincinnati,

¹⁴ C.S. Rafinesque, "A Visit to Big Bone Lick, in 1821".

a distance he estimated as eighteen miles; he came on a borrowed horse in September when the roads could be travelled without too much inconvenience.



Inn at Big Bone Springs

From the Map of 1831

William Davis Robinson, a correspondent who traveled in the area, wrote an article in the London *Times*.¹⁵ According to this article there were thirty-five steamboats, listed by name and tonnage, in operation on the Mississippi and its tributaries in 1819, for a total of 7,259 tons. At least seven steamboats had already been lost to various accidents, but more important was the fact that at least thirty-one more boats, also listed by tonnage and city, were being built—13,257 tons in addition to what was already afloat, and doubtless incorporating many new improvements. This did not mean there were no problems.

Richard Mentor Johnson (1780-1829), was U.S. Senator from Kentucky in 1819-1829. His chief claim to fame (besides being Vice President under Martin Van Buren) was the alleged fact that he had killed Tecumseh. He was best known in Boone County as the Uncle of Cave Johnson, the first county clerk.¹⁶ In 1820 he wrote Henry Clay (1777-1852), then Speaker of the House of Representatives, asking for "Such remarks and observations as you made last summer in descending and ascending the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers from Louisville to New Orleans and back again." Clay replied the

¹⁵ William Davis Robinson, "Steam Navigation--Western Commerce--Future Oppulation of the United States" *The Times* 8 September 1819, p. 3, col. 3-4. (Four being built at Cincinnati and two at Newport.)

¹⁶ Cave Johnson, *Memoirs*.

same day, and as his account is interesting and gives a good idea of the problems of travel at the time, it is included here:

In reply to your note of today I have to state, that I descended the Ohio and Mississippi last Spring in the Steam boat *Napoleon*, having embarked at Shipping port, the foot of the Rapids of the former, about the 20th of April. At the time our brother's fleet, as it was called, intended for the Missouri, lay moored in the port, evincing a great deal of activity in preparations for its departure. The *Napoleon* was a boat of good character and her commander bore a high reputation for enterprise and vigilance. In the course of the voyage, a part of her machinery got disordered, which retarded somewhat our progress. We passed on the Mississippi two, if not three, Steam boats which were lying by, having broken their cranks. Such incidents are frequent; indeed I doubt whether any boat, that has been a year or two on those waters, has escaped them. When they occur, the Boat is subject to a detention of from thirty to fifty days, depending on the distance, where the accident occurs, from Louisville, to which place resort is usually had to supply the loss.

On my return, I ascended the Mississippi in the *Paragon*, a beautiful boat, built at Cincinnati, under the eye of one of her owners. It was her first voyage, and she broke her Lower beam, a most essential part of her machinery, about 30 miles below Natchez. They had to make one, to supply its place, out of the Bastard Live oak, which occasioned several days detention.¹⁷

Both steamboats, on which Clay travelled, are mentioned above. The *Napoleon* was 332 tons, the *Paragon*, of Cincinnati, 400. A number of boats were built in our area. In 1819, four were in progress at Cincinnati; one at Maysville; two at Newport; and one each at Rising Sun and Vevay, Indiana. By 1824 the *General Pike*, 150 tons, was built at Big Bone, and was operated until it wore out. It was named for Gen. Zebulon Pike (1779-1813), who married into a Boone County family before going west and discovering Pike's Peak. The *Pilot* was Big Bone the next year on the same general plan. It ran for several years before hitting a snag near St. Louis, ending her career. The *Speedwell* built in 1827 was snagged at Wheeling, Virginia (now West Virginia), soon after she was launched and the last one built here in the same year, the *Chesapeake*, apparently never ran at all. Our

¹⁷ *The Papers of Henry Clay* vol. 2. ed. J.F. Hopkins (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1961), 800-801.

fleet was not particularly fortunate, but we made our contribution, until the white oak timber gave out.¹⁸

Those were great days in other respects as well. Not all travel was by water. General LaFayette, of Revolutionary War fame, made a progress through the United States in 1825. LaFayette spent the evening with Col. Richard M. Johnson 17th of May and started from Blue Springs near Georgetown at four o'clock the next morning to travel the seventy-five miles to Cincinnati. According to local historian A. M. Yealey, LaFayette stopped on the 18th of May in Boone County, and Mr. Yealey had a silver half-dollar, minted in 1820, that LaFayette spent while he was here; at issue among the local historians is whether he stopped at the Tavern at Gaines Cross Road (Walton) or the one at Maddensville (Florence). The Crossroad Tavern makes the most sense; but that is not the question I am interested in; I am interested in what he got for his 50 cents. If one looks over the tavern rates in effect in 1825—the same as 1819 given above—LaFayette could have gotten a meal (25 c.), lodging for the night (12 1/2 c.), and a half-pint of whisky (12 1/2 c.) for a total of fifty cents. My guess is that as a Frenchman he preferred wither wine or French brandy (37 1/2 c.), along with his lodging at 12 1/2 ct., would come to 50 cents (those half-cents make sense after all), and someone bought his meal for him—after all, he was a famous general. While we do not know exactly how LaFayette's money was spent, many travellers at that time got a meal, accommodations, and something to drink for that amount of money.¹⁹

During this period, according to Willard Rouse Jillson (1890-1975), one of the foremost historians of the Big Bone Lick, the Lick was frequented by the best families of Kentucky, and the adjoining parts of Ohio and Indiana, and says it was "one of the most celebrated health and watering resorts in this part of the Ohio Valley." (footnote ?)

I have not been able to verify his documentation, but this is probably not overstating the facts. He says: "Into the beautiful valley of Big Bone Creek, which the earliest pioneers

¹⁸ Notes on Steamboats. Fitzgerald Scrapbook. Boone County Public Library.

¹⁹ *Military History of Kentucky*; "LaFayette Slept Here" in William Conrad *Yesterdays*. *Clay Papers* vol. 4, p. 447. Letter 17 January 1825, Clay writes that the Ohio River will not admit navigation of steamboats.

had described as encompassing some of the richest land of the Bluegrass, came the family coaches of the Breckinridges, Todds, Crittendens, Clays, Marshalls, McDowells, and many others from over the Commonwealth of Kentucky in those glamorous antebellum days now so far away."²⁰ Little is actually known about the hotel during this era, and it will require much work to be able to recreate it historically.

Most of the land around the Springs at this time was owned by Major Thomas D. Carneal, who has been discussed already in another chapter. 20. In 1826 Carneal bought additional land rights in the area from John J. Marshall of Frankfort. 21. It is likely that Carneal owned the land on which the hotel stood and leased it to proprietors. He had a survey of his lands at Big Bone made by Lewis Webb (1793-1870), the county surveyor, in 1830.²¹ This map contains a symbol for a structure which almost certainly represents the hotel. From the rather stylized representation it is not possible to say much for certain about the features of the building; it is the only structure shown on the survey.

We are fortunate to possess a map drawn the following year which shows much more detail, though it is not drawn to scale, and is not completely accurate in other respects. Rafinesque, an accomplished craftsman, says it is "tolerably accurate." This map confirms that the symbol on the Webb survey is the hotel; if one stands at the Gum Spring facing north, it is on the left hand—in the direction of the river, on the opposite side of the Louisville-Cincinnati Road, and just south of the Landing Road junction. The considerable detail Cooper included in the map makes it valuable for a number of purposes. In particular, it appears that the building (no doubt with additions made from time to time) was constructed in a U shape; probably an L shape previously. The yard was probably fenced and included pasture for horses, with at least one stable. There were two other structures in the neighborhood, probably residences; and on the opposite side of the road, on the way to the major spring and the Island, is shown an old salt well,

²⁰ Jillson, *Big Bone Lick* (1936), p. 94. He cites a single article including the name Breckenridge, "Big Bone Lick Once Gathering Place, Chivalry of the South," *Kentucky Weekly*, Louisville (4 January 1935). This has been asserted by many others, but I would like to see evidence for these families' papers that they were actually here and what they thought of it. (Not mentioned in the first five volumes of Clay's Papers.) Yaley *History of Boone County* (1960) p. 28-29.

²¹ See survey.

probably one of those sunk by James Colquhoun in 1811.²² It is likely that water for medicinal baths was drawn here. If any reliance can be placed in the scale of the map, the building appears to be very large—the yard, for example, appears to be twice as large as the area marked "Present town of Big Bone." The drawing of the inn appears as a large part of the yard, and is much larger than the other houses. Though it would be unwise to infer the actual dimensions, from this evidence it appears likely that it was a substantial building.

The expansion of the hotel reflects the growth of the area and improved road conditions. The importance of river traffic remained constant, but roads began to play a larger role in the area's business. In 1831, the year Cooper published his map, the Kentucky legislature was acting to capitalize on the importance of the Springs: specifically it authorized a road to be built from the town of Landing to the Covington Lexington Turnpike, near the Grant County line. footnote

The growth of the area was promising, and in 1835 the Town of Landing was established by an act of the Legislature, and it was confirmed that a "State" road would be built between the town and the area's major road, the Turnpike to Lexington. Footnote. There were other internal improvements as well. There was a post office in the area by 1829. It was probably associated with the hotel most of the time; it was in Landing in 1834-1835, and then, as was noted earlier, it was likely moved to the hotel, as it is referred to as "Clay's Post Office."²³ It is possible there was a post office in the hotel as late as the 1840's, and it may have been frequented by the area's residents for that reason, if no other.

There were still many improvements made to the roads—although keeping them in repair seems to have been a daunting task. There were even a number of new roads proposed, and most of them were built and maintained in such fashion. Here is one such proposal:

²² See above on Saltmaking at Big Bone.

²³ See Court Orders.

"On motion of John Wallace. It is ordered that Elijah Ryle, Matthew McHatton, Ben E. Garnett and Thomas Huey be and they are hereby appointed who or any three of whom after being first duly sworn to view and mark out the most convenient way for a road from Waggoner's Ferry on the Ohio River to the Big Bone and Burlington road near Jesse Ross's old place passing through the lands Elijah Ryle, thence to the mouth of Riddle's run then up the same to the Big Bone road near Jesse Ross and make report thereof of the conveniences and inconveniences as the law directs." Court Orders. Sept. 1835, p. 560-61.

Even with continued improvements, the area was not at all like it is today; it was heavily wooded—despite the steamboat industry—and must have appeared, in many ways, very much as it did before settlers moved into the area. Sir Charles Lyell (1797-1875) travelled in the United States extensively in 1841-1842, and again in 1846. (He did not become Sir Charles Lyell until 1848.) Lyell visited Big Bone twice, first in 1841, and again the next year, recording observations on his first visit: "Having crossed the river from Cincinnati, we passed through a forest far more magnificent for the size and variety of its trees than any we had before seen. The tulip-tree, the buckeye, a kind of horse chestnut, the shagbark hickory, the beech, the oak, the elm, the chestnut, the locust tree, the sugar-maple, and the willow were in perfection, but no coniferous trees—none of the long-leaved pines of the Southern-Atlantic border, not the cypress, cedar, and hemlock of other States."²⁴ These forests, where there is no undergrowth, are called 'wood pastures'. Originally the cane covered the ground, but when it was eaten down by the cattle, no more crops could get up, and it was replaced by the grass alone." footnote He goes on to discuss at length the nature of the "celebrated bog of Kentucky"; he is particularly interested in the buffalo (which disappeared by about 1812), and their trails, which were also disappearing. He does not mention the hotel—though he does mention the fact that in 1824 the flood reached as high as the second story of a house built near the spring, and it is possible that this was the hotel. As much detail as Lyell mentions about the area, he must have stayed at least several days. By the time he returned in 1842, Lyell may have taken the stagecoach started by McHatton and Thomas, which must have made the area accessible to even more people.

²⁴ . Charles Lyell, *Travels in North America 1841-1842*, p. 139; *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 12 (p. 322), an excellent lengthy sketch. There were once trees of great size in the area. See the historical note to John Uri Lloyd, *Felix Moses*.

The name of Landing was changed in 1846 to Hamilton in honor of Joel Hamilton, one of the original founders²⁵. Union had been chartered as a town in 1838, but its prospects did not seem so good as those of Hamilton. Soon after the founding of the Big Bone Baptist Church in 1843, it was decided to start two missions out of the church—one at Union; the other at Hamilton. It was decided that since Union was not going to grow, the church would purchase a lot in Union and erect a building, which was done at a cost greater than the church at Big Bone had paid for their own building; it was not considered necessary to do the same for Hamilton, since it was growing so rapidly.²⁶ In 1847 the power to levy taxes was granted to Hamilton and Burlington, and another authorized elaborate system of roads between the major towns in Southern Boone County.

In 1846 the Springs at Big Bone Lick changed hands, but though the "celebrated Big Bone Lick Spring" was included, the hotel itself does not seem to have been part of the sale. The sale was made by commissioner John Cave to enforce a decree of the Gallatin Circuit Court on behalf of Griffin P. Theobald, a banker from Grant County, against Dr. Samuel G. Menzies of Florence, for debts. The amount of land offered, 762 acres, considerably less than the 1,050 acres bought by the Bank of the United States from Carneal in 1830; was offered in two tracts, one of 490 acres, and another of 272 acres. The advertisement of the Sale in the Licking River Valley Register of May 1846 (Pg. 2, col. 5), reads: "Said land is situated within one and one-half miles of the Ohio River, and is valuable and well improved, and may be sold in parcels to suit purchasers, if by so doing a better price can be had. The Spring itself may prove to be a grand speculation. If the sale should not be completed on the 8th, it will be continued and closed on the succeeding day." The sale of the larger tract was accomplished, but the smaller tract was offered again for sale the next year. footnote

²⁵ Joel Hamilton appears in Gonzales, Texas in the census of 1850. He is listed as a merchant, and it is stated that he was born in Virginia, and that he was aged 61, which means he was born about 1789. I have not been able to determine his date of death.

²⁶ Big Bone Baptist Church Minutes; Paul Tanner. *Acts of Kentucky General Assembly*.

It was about this time that the fame of the area reached its height. There is a lengthy article in the Register for 13 March 1847 (p. 4, col. 1), two months before Menzies second tract was advertised, entitled "Boone and the Big Bone Springs." It is a nice article with a summary of the principle features of the Lick's history—very much like what we read about it in the local papers today. In the article it is stated that the land values in the county average about fifteen dollars per acre, with many tracts commanding forty to fifty dollars per acre. Even at fifteen dollars per acre, the Springs should have brought over eleven thousand dollars, but it is unlikely that anything near this amount was realized on it. Though there is no intimation in this article, the hotel, which was about to close, and did so in 1847, burnt down soon after.

Judge Lewis Collins (1797-1870) wrote in his *Historical Sketches of Kentucky*, published in 1847, wrote of Big Bone: "The springs at this place have been considerably frequented on account of their medicinal virtues; but at this time no accommodation of any sort for visitors is kept there, and but very inadequate accommodation is to be found anywhere in the neighborhood."²⁷

The area itself continued to grow slowly; in 1849 the town limits of Hamilton were extended, and the legislature granted that no citizen of Hamilton would be required to work on roads more than one mile from town. The next year the L & N (Louisville and Nashville) Railroad was chartered, which would have important consequences for the growth of the area; in this year the census of 1850 gives us a kind of snapshot of the area. The area was prospering, though probably not as much as other areas of the country.

The hotel was missed, and there was an effort by local people to rebuild it. March 1857 the State legislature passed an act to incorporate the Big Bone Hotel Company for one hundred years. It was allowed to issue \$50,000 in stock, to be sold by the following citizens of Big Bone: M. M. McManama, J. Russell Hawkins, Joseph C. Hughes, B. M. Allen, Esau Click, Thomas Rouse, and John W. Leathers.²⁸

²⁷ Lewis Collins, *Historical Sketches* (1847), p. 181; cited in Jillson *Big Bone Lick*, p. 96.

²⁸ Reported by Paul Tanner in his collection of Kentucky Statutes relating to Boone County.

The Hamilton and Union Turnpike Company was chartered in 1852. It was stipulated that the road be run from Hamilton through Big Bone to the nearest point on the Union Florence Turnpike. The subscription at Hamilton was available from M. M. McManama, Esau Click, J. A. Miller, William Howlett, and Thomas Huey; soon after this was amended to proceed from the Hamilton boat landing to Union by way of Big Bone Baptist Church.²⁹ The Lexington & Louisville Railroad was completed; this was the year Henry Clay, whose name had long been associated with the hotel, died. It was realized on all hands that the bad roads were the greatest impediment to developing the Springs as a resort. Between the years there was a project called the Hamilton and Buffalo Hill Turnpike. It was to intersect the Florence Union Turnpike at Weaver's Blacksmith shop.³⁰

The hotel project did not materialize. It seems probable that these road projects, so necessary to the success of the hotel, took most of the effort available; everyone still had their farms to manage, as well as other concerns. The L & N, which had begun in 1850, was completed in 1859. It is obvious a hotel was needed, and there may have still been efforts in the works to construct the hotel, but if so, the Civil War soon brought all such plans to a halt. The Civil War did not bring commerce and visitors to the area. When John Hunt Morgan and Captain Hines, escaping from a Yankee prison, passed by Big Bone Lick on a sunny November day in 1863, nothing was there, and it was probably the seclusion of the area which allowed them to pass successfully through the area. footnote

There were two acres at the Springs that had been donated to the county by Thomas D. Carneal. In 1864, the legislature authorized the county court to sell the land. Carneal was still the largest landowner in the area. In 1866 a set of new proprietors at the Springs was announced. Exactly when the new hotel was built is uncertain, but it must have been started soon after the war, as in June 1866, it was announced in the Cincinnati

²⁹ Orders. September 1835, p. 560-61; Post Office mentioned above. 1835, p. 543. Ferry rates, see above.

³⁰ Ibid., 1935. Turnpikes see Tanner Toll Roads. Further discussion of the Covington-Lexington Turnpike and its importance.

Daily Enquirer that Lucas and Coombs have opened the Springs for the reception of guests. footnote

The new hotel was not built on the same spot as the old structure, but about a quarter of a mile away; it is shown in the atlas of 1883. The building itself, from all reports, was a two-story structure. There was a long veranda with posts across the front. At the left end (towards the river) was an entrance, consisting of double doors, to the ballroom. The ballroom itself was elaborately plastered, with a chandelier in the center. Upstairs there were a series of small rooms across the front for therapeutic bathing. It is likely that all of these facilities were available in 1866; according to Richard H. Collins (1824-1888), son of Lewis Collins, mentioned above, and whose work he greatly expanded: "The springs here have been considerably frequented for many years, on account of their valuable medicinal qualities. Additional buildings were erected in 1871, and the accommodations are now excellent." footnote This was published in 1874, and was doubtless based on personal knowledge.

Thomas Monroe Coombs (1839-1881) was a plucky young man, born in Anderson County, not far from Frankfort. Deciding not to become a farmer, as was family tradition, he moved to Williamstown and became a deputy sheriff; the census of 1860 shows him as a twenty-one year-old deputy, living in a mixed household, that was probably a boarding house. His cousin, Squire Lucas (1810-1873) was Sheriff of Grant County, and in December of that year he married Mary, the sheriff's daughter; his first cousin once removed. He joined the 5th Regiment of Kentucky Cavalry, C.S.A., Co. G, under Captain George W. Terrill (1828-1894), and later he succeeded to the command as Capt. Coombs. footnote This regiment, enlisted at Lexington, served with John Hunt Morgan. Coombs had several escapes, and was imprisoned at Ft. Delaware. His daily journal (since published), kept during the war, and the last entry at the end of the war records his intention of going into business for himself. He managed a store in Williamsburg just before going to war. Squire Lucas was granted tavern licenses in Grant County for several years about that time, and he seems to have gained some experience in

the business that way. I cannot find out much about John Lucas, who was his partner, but they were probably brothers-in-law. The career of Tom Coombs, until his death at the young age of forty-two, was centered around Williamstown. We find him with his wife and four children in the 1870 census, living in Williamstown as a merchant, with a net-worth of about \$1600. He ran the Springs for a short time, and as a former confederate officer was probably hugely popular in the area; but it is same to say he didn't make a fortune at the business.

The *Vevay Democrat* reported in July 1870 that the barbecue at Big Bone was well attended: "Such a quantity of fried fish and barbecued mutton we have not seen for many a day. It was well prepared and the crowd did justice to the refreshments." footnote The speaker was Kentucky orator, Hon. William E. Arthur (). (reprinted Covington Journal July 1870, p. 2/ 4) How this was connected with the hotel cannot be determined, but the grounds were still in use for political rallies. The next year the Covington Journal (8 July 1871 p. 3/1) reported:

Arrangements are in hand for a pleasure excursion by steamer to the Big Bone Springs, on the 15th instant. It will be a big thing in hot weather." footnote On the 5th of August that year the Hon. William E. Arthur delivered a major speech at Big Bone Springs. The speech was reprinted in its entirety in the Covington Journal. It took the entire front page and more than half the second. It dealt with the machinations of the "Radical Party" and must have lasted at least an hour.
footnote

A charter was again granted to the Independence Big Bone Turnpike, and in 1873, the year following, Judge O. P. Hogan's stagecoach lines ran between Walton, Burlington, Covington, and Georgetown on a regular schedule. This made travels to the area much easier—connected to the Railroad at Georgetown. (Steamboat) (notes on development of travel) footnote

The development of the springs as a health resort made a medical presence desirable. The new proprietor was Dr. John E. Stevenson (-), a physician and surgeon, who held eighty acres at the springs. He was born in Bracken County and settled in Boone County in 1850. His advertisement in the Atlas of 1883 reads:

Dr. John E. Stevenson, Proprietor of Hotel of Invalids. Waters unsurpassed. Big Bone Springs, Ky. A Physician of thirty-eight years' experience. Special attention shown to all who visit these springs for cures. Also a pleasant resort for those desiring sport.³¹

Dr. John A. Wood



Physician at the Springs

Dr. John A. Wood also practised at the Springs about this time. Dr. Wood was born in Boone County in 1833. He began a study of medicine at age twenty in 1853, with Dr. B.M. Crisler. He graduated from the Ohio Medical College, Cincinnati, in 1857. He lived at South Fork in Gallatin County, and then for five years at Warsaw where he practised. He moved to the Big Bone Springs in 1874 where he continued as a physician and surgeon. His wife was Delila Sheets, and they had five children. footnote (Perrin, 1887, p. 914.)

The Spring was opening up to visitors, and the legislature chartered the Independence Big Bone Turnpike in 1872. Judge O. P. Hogan of Williamstown began a stage company that ran to Walton and Burlington, and from Covington to Georgetown. (train-CJ) footnote By the time Dr. Christopher Columbus Graham visited in 1876 to prosecute his excavations, the new hotel was well established. (BCR 22 Feb 1877) p.1.

³¹ Dr. Stevenson moved to Boone County from Germantown in Bracken Co. and was the medical officer for the city of Covington for some years.

Christopher Columbus Graham, M. D.



Excavator at Big Bone Lick.

Dr. Graham, who dug at Big Bone Lick, probably in 1875 or 1876 for the "Free Museum of Kentucky" at Louisville, stated: "The land is owned by three proprietors—Mr. McLaughlin, owner of the hotel, ample for two hundred visitors; Mr. Moore and the county of Boone, and Major T. D. Carneal,³² once a prominent citizen of Cincinnati, owning the Lick, and a large body of land around it, deeded to the county of Boone, two acres, including the largest spring..." The Recorder published some gossip in May of that year: "Rumor says John O. Campbell will soon take charge of the hotel at Big Bone Springs."³³ One hopes that this is not the first Campbell (1819-1882) knew of it. However that may be a couple of weeks later he was ready for business: "Mr. J. O. Campbell, formerly of Burlington, is now ready to accommodate boarders at the Big Bone Lick. The excellent reputation as a hotel-keeper cannot fail to insure him a large custom."³⁴ By 1877 the establishment at the Springs was being visited by Albert S. Berry, the Mayor of Newport.³⁵ "One of the pleasantest places to visit in this hot weather is the Big Bone Springs. Colonel J. O. Campbell and Son, formerly of Burlington, have

³² Carneal was dead by this time. On Graham see my article published in the *Journal of the Kentucky Academy of Science*. "Christopher Columbus Graham: Kentucky Man of Science".

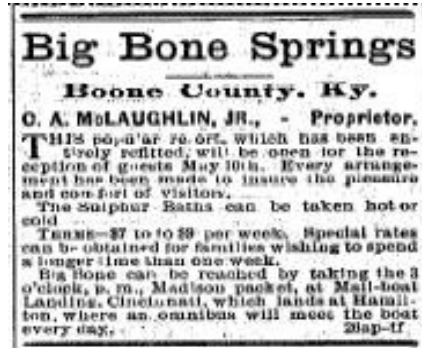
³³ *Boone County Recorder*, 11 May 1876, p. 3, col. 1.

³⁴ *Boone County Recorder* 25 May 1876, p. 3, col. 2.

³⁵ *Newport Local*, 17 July 1877, p.3

charge of the Clay House there, and are doing their best to provide for the comfort and amusement of their guests."³⁶

The Independence and Big Bone Turnpike Company must have been active, for in



Daily Commonwealth 1881

1880 the acts of the company were declared valid by the state legislature. About this time the hotel was closed for a short time and it was completely redecorated by the new owner. The opening was announced as 10 May 1881. The rates were \$7 to \$9 per week, with special rates for families that wished to stay longer than a week. Sulfur baths, hot or cold, were offered as well. The new proprietor, C. A. McLaughlin, Jr., stated: "Every arrangement has been made to insure the pleasure and comfort of visitors."³⁷

It has been assumed by most people that the hotel of Dr. John E. Stevenson advertised in the *Lake Atlas* of 1883 as a "Hotel for Invalids. Waters Unsurpassed."³⁸ is the same hotel. April 1882 trio of medicine men; it is possibly not the same. The *Daily Commonwealth*³⁹ notes him as proprietor of the "Valley Hotel" and stated that he was giving "an elegant cotillion party at his commodious dwelling" at which the "cream of the neighborhood" was in attendance.

In August of that year Dr. Stevenson had to dismiss his bartender, Benny Allpin.⁴⁰ "The doctor says he intends to run the bar in a legitimate style and will not tolerate any

³⁶ "Letter from Clay House", *The Ticket* 29 August 1876 p. 2, col. 2.

³⁷ *Covington Journal*

³⁸ p. 22.

³⁹ 6 January 1882 p. 4, col. 4.

⁴⁰ Usually spelt Allphin.

'monkey business' about his premises." This was concluded as a worthy move on the Doctor's part.⁴¹

In the same column it was reported that C. A. McLaughlin, Sr., was planning to move to the Clay House for the winter. It also reported "considerable chill and fever" and said the physicians were jubilant at the prospect. Things at the hotel seem to have gone well. Local people continued to visit. 1892 Mr. and Mrs. Sebrun Perry Brady (1816-1896). In 1894 the Grant County Medical Association met there. A paper by Dr. Myrax J. Crouch (1865-1954) of Union was read to the local Medical Association.

By 1896 it was reported that conditions of the hotel were very poor. It was still owned by C. A. McLaughlin. The roads remained very poor. 1900 there was a Medical Association meeting at the Springs. Dr. Crouch again read a paper—this one a very interesting paper on the Springs themselves, which was reprinted in the Boone County *Recorder*. There was some further economic activity at the Springs. In 1904 McLaughlin announced a shipment of Lickwater, which was popular, but it seems not to have lasted long. In 1909 there was an attempt to build a Traction Road to the Springs, and a company was set up under the leadership of Dr. Myrax J. Crouch, but this too came to naught. In 1916 Big Bone Springs Mineral Water Co., was established with a stock of \$10,000. It was sold locally, and at stores in other parts of the state; but it appears not to have lasted long either. The Springs had lost their economic viability, and from this point on their historical value became the primary interest. That is an interesting story, but it forms no part of the history of the Big Bone Springs Hotel, which is a significant aspect of an earlier era of our history.

⁴¹ *Daily Commonwealth* 1882 4/3.